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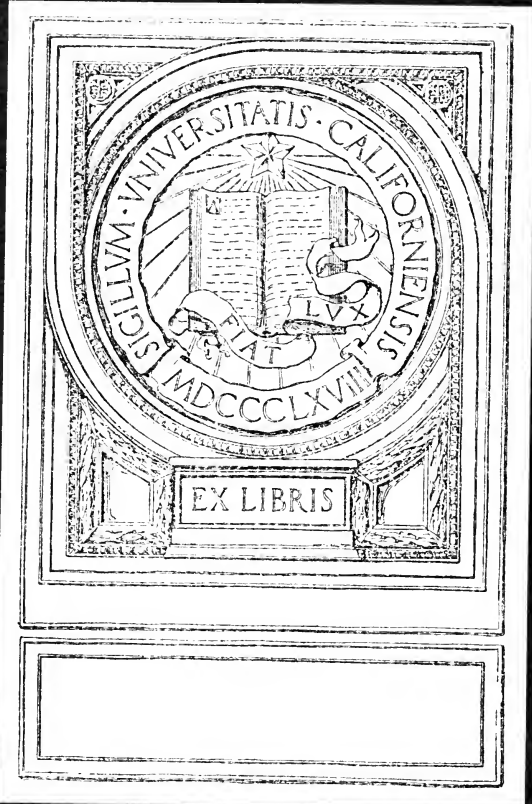


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John C. Blankenagel

The Attitude of Heinrich v. Kleist
toward the Problems of Life







Hesperia

Schriften zur germanischen Philologie
herausgegeben von Hermann Collitz und Henry Wood
Professoren an der Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore

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The Attitude of Heinrich von Kleist toward the Problems of Life

by

John Carl Blankenagel, Ph. D.

Associate Professor of German, Goucher College, Baltimore



Göttingen
Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht
1917

Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press

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Altcr. Zentralbl. f. Deutschland 1913, 27.

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3. **Wörterbuch und Reimverzeichnis zu dem „Armen Heinrich“** Hartmanns von Aue. Von **Guido C. E. Riemer**, Prof. a. d. Bucknell-Universität, Lewisburg, Pa. 1912. IV u. 162 S. gr. 8. Geh. 3 *M*; Leinwdbd. 3,70 *M*.

“This dictionary to Hartmann's *Armer Heinrich* is modeled on Benecke's Wörterbuch zu Hartmann's Iwein and is intended to serve the purposes of the beginner as well as of the scholar. As in Benecke, each citation is given in the form of a complete phrase or clause which greatly facilitates its use. The analysis of the meanings of individual words has found a rather fuller treatment than in the dictionary of Benecke. Even for so short a poem as the *Armer Heinrich* the preparation of a complete glossary in the manner indicated is no small undertaking. The author has performed his task with a thoroughness and accuracy that will compare favorably with any similar work . . . The book is a model of good workmanship.“

B. J. Vos, Indiana University, in *Modern Language Notes* 1914, January.

4. **Nature in Middle High German Lyrics.** By **Bayard Quincy Morgan**, Ph. D., University of Wisconsin, Madison. 1912. VIII u. 220 S. gr. 8. Geh. 7 *M*; Leinwdbd. 7,80 *M*.

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Preface.

As this monograph goes to press, it is a genuine pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness for valuable aid and suggestions to Professor A. R. Hohlfeld of the German Department of the University of Wisconsin, and to Professors Hermann Collitz and Henry Wood of the German Department of Johns Hopkins University.

J. C. B.

Introduction.

Notwithstanding the occurrence of scattered remarks on Kleist's views on life, to be met with in the various biographies, and the more connected observations made by Kayka¹ and Röbbling², a unified presentation of the poet's theory of life is still lacking. In the following pages, the attempt will be made to portray Kleist's attitude toward certain questions, which seem fundamental for an understanding of his theory of life. Wherever possible, a development in his views will be sketched, together with causes making for changes in his attitude. It must be borne in mind, that in a number of such changes, Kleist is shown to be essentially a product of his time and its attendant streams of thought, of the readjustment necessitated by the conflicting tendencies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Kleist's letters reveal much serious reflection upon certain fundamental problems of life, and to a considerable extent his other writings have received the impress of such contemplation; the effort will be made in the present essay to utilize all his writings, and to glean from them what is of importance in determining his conceptions.

By way of introduction to the conflicts which Kleist waged in his search for a „gefestigte Weltanschauung“, it becomes necessary at the outset to dwell briefly on the struggle between two qualities: „Gefühl“ and „Verstand“. Being a child of a generation which held up culture and enlightenment as the great ends worthy to be striven for, it is not surprising that Kleist's awakening intellect should have been seized with the desire for „Bildung“. In fact, this endeavor became a veritable cult for him, a cult to be pursued under the direction of reason. Thus at the outset he sought to base his

¹ Ernst Kayka: Kleist und die Romantik, p. 127 ff. — ² Friedrich Röbbling: Kleists Käthchen von Heilbronn, p. 61 ff.

theory of life on a purely rationalistic foundation; his mental faculties, when fully developed, were to direct his life. „Bildung“, he confidently assumes with a firm, naïve pride in reason, will lead him to the acquisition and permanent possession of a stock of absolute truths, truths which will hold now and for all time, here and on all the planets of the universe. But as regards the acquisition of „Bildung“, he was confident that it alone could secure permanent happiness.

Thus in the year 1799, Kleist refers to himself as „ein denkender Mensch“¹, states that „Vernunft“² should guide him, desires suggestions from „einem vernünftigen Manne“³, regards mathematics, philosophy⁴ and logic⁵ as the foundations of all knowledge, affirms that his resolve to study is born of „höhere Vernunft“⁶, asserts that „ein freier denkender Mensch“ chooses his course „nach seiner Vernunft“⁷ and is consistent in his actions because he has „Gründe der Vernunft“ for his every act and word⁸. He feels himself subject only to the dictates of reason⁹ to which one must subject oneself completely. „Vernunft“ assures man of his inward happiness¹⁰.

Until November 12, 1799, there is no record extant that would indicate a strong influence from any factor other than reason in Kleist's attitude toward life and development. He subsequently speaks of the heart as opposed to reason, and maintains that happiness dwells in the heart and cannot be demonstrated like a mathematical problem, but must be felt¹¹. There then follow numerous passages in which now „Verstand“, now „Herz“ or „Gefühl“ are stressed, the emphasis apparently being dependent in some cases on mere temporary mood, in others upon the quickening of his emotional nature due to his love or to his gradually awakened appreciation of nature. He balances „die schwankenden ungewissen, zweideutigen Rechte der Vernunft“ against „die Rechte meines Herzens“¹², in favor of the latter; he desires to develop both „Verstand und Einbildungskraft“ in Wilhelmine¹³, yet he emphasizes „Verstand, Urteilstkraft und Vernunft“ at another time¹⁴; again he squares off „Gefühl und Verstand“ against

¹ V, 24, 15. — ² V, 24, 33. — ³ V, 25, 24. — ⁴ V, 32, 14.

⁵ V, 32, 26. — ⁶ V, 38, 13. — ⁷ V, 41, 34. — ⁸ V, 42, 20.

⁹ V, 44, 9. — ¹⁰ V, 44, 21. — ¹¹ V, 48, 3. — ¹² 59, 2.

¹³ V, 63, 28. — ¹⁴ V, 66, 18.

each other¹. He no longer believes that human reason can penetrate into the ultimate ends and designs of the universe, but feels that it has its limitations². His friend Brockes exerts rather a strong influence on Kleist at this period, and Kleist reports his friend's opinions as follows³: „Immer nannte er den Verstand kalt, und nur das Herz wirkend und schaffend . . . Immer seiner ersten Regung gab er sich ganz hin, das nannte er seinen Gefühlsblick, und ich selbst habe nie gefunden, daß dieser ihn getäuscht habe“. It is important to note that the one-sided domination of the rational faculties, which Kleist subscribed to in his early letters of 1799, is now (1801) no longer prevalent, but has been modified. Through Brockes he has become aware of a gulf between knowing and doing⁴; his attention has been focused more sharply upon the difference between the coldness of reason and the responsiveness of the heart.

The break with his view of reason as a directing power and as the source of knowledge comes early in the year 1801, when his faith in reason is sent tottering by his study of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason. His letter to Wilhelmine⁵, as well as one to Ulrike⁶, show how he was struck where he was most vulnerable. The hope he had entertained of gathering knowledge and absolute truths which should be valid throughout all eternity and throughout the entire universe was rudely shattered. He no longer has a goal⁷, and writes⁸: „Mich ekelt vor Allem, was Wissen heißt“. He now emphasizes „Sinn und Herz“⁹ and despairs of reason¹⁰. „Was Ihnen Ihr Herz sagt, ist Goldklang, und der spricht es selbst aus, daß er echt sei“¹¹. Though Kleist still uses the terms „Verstand und Vernunft“, which had become fairly habitual with him, he now emphasizes the primacy of „Gefühl“ as a source of knowledge and a guide to conduct. This is to be seen from passages such as the following: „Nichts, nichts gedacht, frage dein erstes Gefühl, dem folge“¹². „O der Verstand! Der unglückselige Verstand! . . . Folge deinem Gefühl“¹³. He exalts the heart above

¹ V, 100, 21; V, 107, 28; V, 116, 19; V, 131, 4; V, 150, 30.

² V, 127, 18. — ³ V, 188, 25. — ⁴ V, 188, 10. — ⁵ V, 203, 27.

⁶ V, 207, 1. — ⁷ V, 207, 11. — ⁸ V, 207, 22. — ⁹ V, 222, 7.

¹⁰ V, 249, 8. — ¹¹ V, 233, 32. — ¹² V, 273, 26, Dec. 1801.

¹³ 328, 8, Aug. 1806. —

knowledge¹ and speaks of the French as mere „Affen der Vernunft“². After his disillusionment through his Kantian studies, Kleist refers a number of times to Rousseau and commends reading the latter's works³.

With regard to Kleist's insistence upon „Gefühl“ as a guide to conduct, much has been written from opposing viewpoints. Erich Schmidt has summed up tersely some of the more important references in Kleist's works to „Gefühl“⁴, but deals largely with the element of so-called „Gefühlsverwirrung“ which he points out as being prevalent in most of Kleist's major characters. The most convincing treatment of „Gefühl“ as a guide to action, is that given by Röbbeling. He writes in part as follows: „Verlieren durch Kants Idealismus — so schien es wenigstens — Sinneswahrnehmung und Verstandesurteil ihren Erkenntniswert, so steigt naturgemäß in seinem Wert das von Sinneswahrnehmung und Verstand unabhängige „Gefühl“. Es ist imstande, eine innere Welt als die wahre aufzubauen; die Außenwelt als die des Scheins sinkt zur Bedeutungslosigkeit herab. Es ist auch imstande, das Wesen der Dinge zu erfassen, weil es selbst das Wesen des Menschen ausmacht⁵. . . .“ Aber was versteht Kleist unter „Gefühl“? Das Gefühl ist gleichsam die Seele der Seele. Es ist ein höheres Wahrnehmungsvermögen und zugleich ein intuitives Erkenntnisvermögen⁶. . . .“ „Dieses Gefühl muß der Mensch in sich walten lassen und sich ihm völlig, auch gegen Sinnenschein, Verstandeserwägung und leidenschaftliche Begierde, überlassen. Dann wandelt er sicher seinen Weg und erreicht das ihm von der gütigen Gottheit gesteckte Ziel seines Lebens“⁷. Of this view of Kleist, „Käthchen“ seems to Röbbeling to be the poetical embodiment⁸, for in spite of the severe tests to which her „Gefühl“ is put, it triumphs over them all and remains unshaken.

Traces of a similar insistence upon the primacy of inner feeling are discernible in other works of Kleist. Suffice it to point to but a few as representing the early, middle and late periods of Kleist's poetical productivity. Eustache says in

¹ V, 261, 5, 1801. — ² V, 284, 31, 1802. — ³ V, 202, 25; V, 218, 12; V, 227, 4; V, 238, 14; V, 346, 13. — ⁴ Erich Schmidt: Charakteristiken I, p. 358 ff. — ⁵ Friedrich Röbbeling: Das Käthchen von Heilbronn, p. 56.

⁶ Ib., p. 57. — ⁷ Ib., p. 58. — ⁸ Ib., p. 46.

in „Die Familie Schroffenstein“: „Nun, über jedwedes Geständnis geht mein innerstes Gefühl doch.“ And Agnes maintains similarly²: „Denn etwas gibt's, das über alles Wähnen und Wissen hoch erhaben — das Gefühl ist es der Seelengüte anderer.“ Jupiter assures Alkmene that her infallible „Gefühl“ has not deceived her³. The Marquise von O. is an example of a woman sorely tried, whose inner feeling of innocence fortifies her and enables her to pursue her course firmly under adverse circumstances.

Thus Kleist gradually came from an early firm confidence in reason to an ultimate faith in „Gefühl“ as a guide to knowledge and to action. As Servaes maintains, his final view was as follows⁴: „Das feste Vertrauen auf sein Gefühl ist für ihn das absolut Höchste. Nur die stärkste Gefühlssicherheit befähigt nach seiner Meinung den Menschen zum Handeln. Einzig wenn er völlig mit sich im reinen, naiv sich selber überlassen ist, vermag er zu wirken und zu schaffen“.

The foundation of Kleist's views having been thus briefly indicated, an analysis of various important factors will now be turned to.

Religion.

In a letter to his sister Ulrike written in May 1799, Kleist's independent attitude toward organized, conventional religion manifests itself in these words⁵: „Etwas muß dem Menschen heilig sein. Uns beide, denen es die Ceremonien der Religion und die Vorschriften des conventionellen Wohlstandes nicht sind, müssen um so mehr die Gesetze der Vernunft heilig sein.“ Thus his subjection of himself to the dictates of reason alone, his rationalistic position toward religion stands out clearly and unmistakably. Nevertheless he acknowledges distinctly and emphatically that he has a religion, a religion which he holds to be of his own fashioning and which meets his own demands⁶. His early religion, however, is not one which revels in heaven as a compensatory ideal, as a haven of rest and refuge to which the sorely tried soul aspires

¹ I, 97, 1617. — ² I, 82, 1356. — ³ I, 259, 1289. — ⁴ Franz Servaes: Heinrich v. Kleist, p. 91. — ⁵ V, 44, 13. — ⁶ V, 49, 34; V, 203, 34.

when unable to adjust itself to this world. In a letter to Wilhelmine von Zenge of March 22, 1801, he sums up what he has hitherto considered as his religion as follows¹: „Ich hatte schon als Knabe (mich dünkt am Rhein durch eine Schrift von Wieland) mir den Gedanken angeeignet, daß die Vervollkommnung der Zweck der Schöpfung wäre. Ich glaubte, daß wir einst nach dem Tode von der Stufe der Vervollkommnung, die wir auf diesem Sterne erreichten, auf einem andern weiter fortschreiten würden, und daß wir den Schatz von Wahrheiten, den wir hier sammelten, auch dort einst brauchen könnten. Aus diesen Gedanken bildete sich so nach und nach eine eigne Religion, und das Bestreben, nie auf einen Augenblick hienieden still zu stehen, und immer unaufhörlich einem höhern Grade von Bildung entgegenzuschreiten, ward bald das einzige Prinzip meiner Tätigkeit. Bildung schien mir das einzige Ziel, das des Bestrebens, Wahrheit der einzige Reichthum, der des Besitzes würdig ist. Ich weiß nicht, liebe Wilhelmine, ob Du diese zwei Gedanken: Wahrheit und Bildung, mit einer solchen Heiligkeit denken kannst, als ich. . . . Mir waren sie so heilig, daß ich diesen beiden Zwecken, Wahrheit zu sammeln, und Bildung mir zu erwerben, die kostbarsten Opfer brachte.“

The above lines bespeak the rationalistic, ethical foundation for what the young Kleist terms his religion. Kleist's early view represents unceasing effort and much sacrifice for the attainment of a goal that he deems most sacred; it is not an end which is to be reached by idleness, but one that demands untiring activity and unceasing striving. Meyer-Benfey has characterized this view of religion in the following words²: „Der Glaube an die unendliche Vervollkommnung als der Weltzweck, der Glaube, daß unser irdisches Leben nur Vorstufe und Vorbereitung für ein erhöhtes Dasein auf anderen Sternen ist, daß daher unser heiligster Beruf ist, einen Schatz von Weisheit und Bildung anzusammeln, als Ausrüstung für das künftige Leben jenseits des Grabes. Der Kern dieser Gedanken ist Gemeingut des 18. Jahrhunderts. . . . Ebenso wichtig indessen, wie diese Gedanken selbst, war, daß sie an und aus der Betrachtung der Natur entwickelt wurden. So besteht

¹ V, 203, 27. — ² Heinrich Meyer-Benfey: Das Drama Heinrich von Kleists. I, p. 21.

zwischen ihr und der moralischen Welt ein enges und harmonisches Verhältnis. Die Mathematik, Grundlage des Ganzen, als Lehrerin jener zweifelfreien Gewißheit, die aus eigenem Denken und klarer Einsicht erwächst; die auf ihr gegründete Naturbeobachtung als Schule des Selbstdenkens und als Material für die Entwicklung der metaphysischen Wahrheiten, auf denen unsre Weisheit und Tugend beruht -- das ist der Grundriß dieser Gedankenwelt. Wir sind uns klar bewußt, wie ganz wir hier in dem naiven Dogmatismus und begeisterten Optimismus der vorkantischen Periode stecken, jener Zeit, die von dem Geiste Leibnizens beherrscht wird, die ebenso naiv ist in ihrem empirischen Realismus wie dem über alle Grenzen möglicher Erkenntnis hinausschwärmenden Idealismus.“

In various letters, Kleist explains his religious views quite concisely. His attitude toward organized prevailing forms of religion stands out clearly in a letter to Wilhelmine of September 1800, in which he tells her¹ that all true enlightenment of woman ultimately consists in being able to think rationally of the goal of terrestrial life. He holds that the godhead can demand nothing at all from her other than the fulfillment of her mission upon this earth. He therefore enjoins her to do as follows²: „Schränke dich also ganz für diese kurze Zeit ein. Kümme dich nicht um Deine Bestimmung nach dem Tode, weil du darüber leicht Deine Bestimmung auf dieser Erde vernachlässigen könntest.“ It occurs to him³ that such thoughts may offend her religious conceptions, hence he launches forth into a discussion of religion. He points toward the futility of religious speculation and contemplation; it is idle and of no avail. On the other hand he emphasizes man's duty to fill his place in this world and urges her to bend all her energies in that direction⁴. He points out the necessity of living in the present rather than revelling in the thought of the future and thereby becoming oblivious to demands made upon man here and now⁵. He continues⁶: „Es ist möglich liebe Freundin, daß mir deine Religion hierin widerspricht und daß sie Dir gebietet, auch etwas für Dein künftiges Leben zu

¹ V, 127, 16. — ² V, 127, 32. — ³ V, 128, 2. — ⁴ V, 128, 7.

⁵ V, 129, 11. — ⁶ V, 129, 26.

tun. Du wirst gewiß Gründe für Deinen Glauben haben, so wie ich Gründe für den meinigen; und so fürchte ich nicht, daß diese kleine Religionszwistigkeit unsrer Liebe eben großen Abbruch tun wird. Wo nur die Vernunft herrschend ist, da vertragen sich auch die Meinungen leicht; und da die Religionstoleranz schon eine Tugend ganzer Völker geworden ist, so wird es, denke ich, der Duldung nicht sehr schwer werden, in zwei liebenden Herzen zu herrschen.“ His tolerance shows itself further¹: „Wenn Du Dich also durch die Einflüsse Deiner früheren Erziehung gedrungen fühltest, durch die Beobachtung religiöser Ceremonien auch etwas für Dein ewiges Leben zu tun, so würde ich weiter nichts als Dich warnen, ja nicht darüber Dein irdisches Leben zu vernachlässigen.

Kleist's insistence upon activity, effort and right living rather than mere formal ceremonial worship is expressed as follows²: „Denn nur zu leicht glaubt man, man habe Alles getan, wenn man die ernsten Gebräuche der Religion beobachtet, wenn man fleißig in die Kirche geht, täglich betet und jährlich 2 mal das Abendmahl nimmt.“ All this is mere outward form and absolutely worthless unless it have its directing effect on the dealings of daily life. Such ceremonial and outward conformity is merely the external manifestation of a feeling which may work just the opposite, impelling man to dastardly deeds of violence³. He calls to her mind, that all religious forms and customs are mere developments of the human mind and are not God-given⁴: „Ich will Dich dadurch nur aufmerksam machen, daß alle diese religiösen Gebräuche nichts sind, als menschliche Vorschriften, die zu allen Zeiten verschieden waren und noch in diesem Augenblicke an allen Orten der Erde verschieden sind. Darin kann also das Wesen der Religion nicht liegen, weil es ja sonst höchst schwankend und ungewiß wäre. Wer steht uns dafür, daß nicht in Kurzem ein zweiter Luther uns aufsteht, und umwirft, was jener baute. Aber in uns flammt eine Vorschrift — und die muß göttlich sein, weil sie ewig und allgemein ist, sie heißt: erfülle Deine Pflicht; und dieser Satz enthält die Lehren aller Religionen. Alle anderen Sätze folgen aus diesem und sind in ihm gegründet, oder sie sind nicht darin begriffen, und dann sind

¹ V, 129, 36. — ² V, 130, 4. — ³ V, 130, 8. — ⁴ V, 130, 14.

sie unfruchtbar und unnütz“. Rahmer holds Kleist's position to be as follows¹: „Alles spricht dafür, daß Kleist schon von Jugend an, wohl unter dem Einfluß seines Lehrers Wunsch einen unabhängigen, freigeistigen Standpunkt dem Christentum gegenüber einnahm. Seine Religion und seine ethische Anschauung ist: der Mensch hat die Pflicht, sich schon auf dieser Welt bis zur höchsten Vollendung zu entwickeln, sich um das künftige Leben nicht zu kümmern; er hat die Bestimmung seines irdischen Daseins zu erfüllen; er soll sich über sein Schicksal erheben und sein Schicksal leiten lernen“.

In accordance with such independent views, Kleist, as might be expected, refers to Christ as a human being, as an historic personage, but as one who demands the greatest respect. He mentions Christ as „jener beste und edelste der Menschen, der den Tod am Kreuze für die Menschheit starb“². The last part of this statement might seem to imply that Christ was more than man, but other passages rate him merely as a human being. In the same article from which the above quotation is taken, Kleist enumerates Christ³, Socrates, Leonidas and Regulus as „große seltne Menschen“ and adds that they all owe their present-day fame and renown to chance which favored them. He goes on to say: „Ohne den Melitus und ohne den Herodes würde Sokrates und Christus uns vielleicht unbekannt geblieben, und doch nicht minder groß und erhaben gewesen sein“⁴. Again he speaks of Christ together with Socrates as „Helden der Tugend“⁵. Elsewhere he attributes to Christ the same need of human support and sympathy as other human beings are in need of⁶. Again he mentions Christ on the cross as typifying innocence unjustly punished⁷. Kayka maintains: „Jesus erscheint nämlich durchaus nur als Mensch“⁸.

It may be well to note Kleist's attitude toward the Catholic religion, of which he wrote at various times. The majority of his remarks on this faith are unfavorable. During his journey to Würzburg he writes to Wilhelmine von Zenge⁹: „Dabei fällt mir eine Kirche ein, die ich Dir noch nicht beschrieben habe; die Nickolskirche zu Leipzig. Sie ist im

¹ S. Rahmer: H. v. Kleist als Mensch und Dichter, p. 401.

² IV, 63, 2. — ³ IV, 72, 8. — ⁴ IV, 72, 14. — ⁵ V, 48, 31.

⁶ V, 108, 13. — ⁷ V, 174, 22. — ⁸ Ernst Kayka: Kleist und die Romantik, p. 130. — ⁹ V, 112, 26.

Äußern, wie die Religion, die in ihr gepredigt wird, antik, im Innern nach dem modernsten Geschmack ausgebaut. Aus der Kühnheit der äußeren Wölbungen sprach uns der Götze der abenteuerlichen Gothen zu; aus der edeln Simplicität des Innern wehte uns der Geist der verfeinerten Griechen an. Schade daß ein . . . ich hätte beinah etwas gesagt, was die Priester übelnehmen. Aber das weiß ich, daß die edeln Gestalten der leblosen Steine wärmer zu meinem Herzen sprachen, als der hochgelehrte Priester auf seiner Kanzel“. He describes the impression, which Würzburg as a Catholic city made upon him, as follows¹: „Das Ganze hat ein echt katholisches Ansehen. Neun und dreißig Türme zeigen an, daß hier ein Bischof wohne, wie ehemals die ägyptischen Pyramiden, daß hier ein König begraben sei. Die ganze Stadt wimmelt von Heiligen, Aposteln und Engeln, und wenn man durch die Straßen geht, so glaubt man, man wandle durch den Himmel der Christen. Aber die Täuschung dauert nicht lang. Denn Heere von Pfaffen und Mönchen, buntscheckig montiert, wie die Reichstruppen, laufen uns unaufhörlich entgegen und erinnern uns an die gemeinste Erde.“ From these passages just quoted it is readily seen that Kleist has little or no respect for priests and monks as representatives of their creed. His ironical, skeptical view of certain prescribed forms of prayer is voiced in a description of a Catholic cathedral²: „Messen und Hora wechseln immer miteinander ab, und die Perlen der Rosenkränze sind in ewiger Bewegung. Denn es gilt die Rettung der Stadt, und da die Franzosen für ihren Untergang beten, so kommt es darauf an, wer am meisten betet. Ich, mein liebes Kind, habe Ablass auf 200 Tage. In einem Kloster auf dem Berge 2 bei b, hinter dem Citadel, lag vor einem wunderthätigen Marienbilde ein gedrucktes Gebet, mit der Ankündigung, daß wer es mit Andacht läse, diesen Ablass haben sollte. Gelesen habe ich es; doch da es nicht mit der gehörigen Andacht geschah, so werde ich mich doch wohl vor Sünden hüten, und nach wie vor tun müssen, was Recht ist.“

The impression which entrance into a Catholic church makes upon him at this time (1800) is described in these words³: „Wenn man in eine solche katholische Kirche tritt,

¹ V, 114, 21. — ² V, 115, 25. — ³ V, 116, 6.

und das weitgebogene Gewölbe sieht, und diese Altäre und diese Gemälde — und diese versammelte Menschenmenge mit ihren Gebärden — wenn man diesen ganzen Zusammenfluß von Veranstaltungen, sinnend betrachtet, so kann man gar nicht begreifen, wohin das Alles führen solle. Bei uns erweckt doch die Rede des Priesters, oder ein Gellertsches Lied manchen herzerhebenden Gedanken; aber das ist hier bei dem Murmeln des Pfaffen, das niemand hört, und selbst niemand verstehen würde, wenn man es auch hörte, weil es lateinisch ist, nicht möglich. Ich bin überzeugt, daß alle diese Präparate nicht einen einzigen vernünftigen Gedanken erwecken.“ Kleist's antagonism toward mere outward form and ceremonial again finds expression in a criticism of the formal worship of the Catholic church¹: „Überhaupt, dünkt mich, alle Ceremonien ersticken das Gefühl. Sie beschäftigen unsern Verstand, aber das Herz bleibt tot. Die bloße Absicht, es zu erwärmen, ist, wenn sie sichtbar wird, hinreichend, es zu erkalten.“ He mocks at the idea of faith cures which are attributed to healing powers of images of Mary². Of the zeal of the church in attempting to wipe out all opposition, he says³: „In Kurzem wird hier eine Prozession sein, zur Niederschlagung der Feinde, und, wie es heißt, „zur Ausrottung aller Ketzer.“ Also auch zu Deiner und meiner Ausrottung.“ The contemplation of churches and convents affords him but little pleasure⁴, yet he praises the Benedictine monks⁵, as belonging to the most industrious order. In this praise one can again see Kleist's demand that man render active service for the betterment of self and mankind. That is his religion. He speaks further of the lack of sincerity among inhabitants of Catholic cities⁶. The Catholic faith seems to him to rob people of their freedom⁷: „Auch hier erinnert das Läuten der Glocken unaufhörlich an die katholische Religion, wie das Geklirr der Ketten den Gefangenen an seine Sklaverei. Mitten in einem geselligen Gespräche sinken bei dem Schall des Geläuts alle Knie, alle Häupter neigen, alle Hände falten sich; und wer auf seinen Füßen stehen bleibt, ist ein Ketzer.“

In marked contrast with these early adverse criticisms (1800) of the Catholic religion with its attendant ceremonies and

¹ V, 116, 18—23. — ² V, 116, 32. — ³ V, 117, 3. — ⁴ V, 117, 7.

⁵ V, 117, 11. — ⁶ V, 119, 22. — ⁷ V, 125, 3.

institutions, is the statement to Wilhelmine von Zenge, made shortly after his Kant experience. He writes thus¹: „Nirgends fand ich mich aber tiefer in meinem Innersten gerührt, als in der katholischen Kirche, wo die größte, erhebendste Musik noch zu den andern Künsten tritt, das Herz gewaltsam zu bewegen. Ach, Wilhelmine, unser Gottesdienst ist keiner. Er spricht nur zu dem kalten Verstande, aber zu allen Sinnen ein katholisches Fest. Mitten vor dem Altar, an seinen untersten Stufen, kniete jedesmal, ganz isoliert von den Andern, ein gemeiner Mensch, das Haupt auf die höheren Stufen gebückt, betend mit Inbrunst. Ihn quälte kein Zweifel, er glaubt. Ich hatte eine unbeschreibliche Sehnsucht mich neben ihn niederzuwerfen, und zu weinen — Ach, nur einen Tropfen Vergessenheit, und mit Wollust würde ich katholisch werden —.“ Kleist has now become skeptical of reason and no longer reposes his former unconditional trust in it. Not the Catholic religion as a form of worship of the divine appealed to Kleist, but the impression made upon his emotional nature through his senses, which had now become so susceptible to impression. Mortimer's words in „Maria Stuart“ give a good portrayal of the manner in which Kleist was now affected by the Catholic cathedral²:

„Wie wurde mir, als ich ins Innre nun
Der Kirchen trat und der Gestalten Fülle
Verschwenderisch an Wand und Decke quoll,
Das Herrlichste und Höchste, gegenwärtig
Vor den entzückten Sinnen sich bewegte.“

Another point is of importance in this change of Kleist's mood. Kleist now appreciates the solace which comes to the heart through a faith which brooks no doubt. In this unhappy frame of mind, which doubts all values, he longs for something to cling to, for some guiding force to save him from being tossed about on the sea of life like a mere toy. Hence he emphasizes the word „believes“. „Ihn quälte kein Zweifel, er glaubt.“³ This craving for an anchor in a storm-tossed life is the cause of the fervent desire for a drop of forgetfulness which might enable him to become Catholic.

In some of his works Kleist touches upon the Catholic

¹ V, 222, 25. — May 1801. — ² Schiller: Maria Stuart, 1. 434.

³ V, 222, 33.

religion, its institutions and sphere of influence. With regard to this point in general and its bearing on the story, „Die heilige Cäcilie“, in particular, Steig writes as follows¹: „Es (Die heilige Cäcilie) ist das einzige Schriftstück Kleist's in den Abendblättern, das wie in katholisierender Tendenz geschrieben scheint.“ He adds further²; „Nicht eigentlich katholisierende Tendenz, sondern politische Opposition allerfeinster und allerschärfster Art wohnt, in den Abendblättern, der Heiligen Cäcilie inne.“ In „Das Erdbeben in Chili“, the fanatic power of the priesthood is portrayed in dark, sinister colors, a power which stirs up the feelings of people who are thankful for having escaped with their lives and who are thereby impelled to most cruel bloodshed and deeds of violence. Thus the terrible, destructive effect of religion is revealed much after the manner of Kleist's letter to Wilhelmine, in which he tells her that³ the Mexican throttles his brother before the altar of his idol with the same feeling with which she receives the sacrament. In „Der Findling“ there appears the immorality within the church, with its demoralizing influence upon the character of Nicolo who frequents the monastery. The bishop has his mistress, Xaviera, with whom Nicolo also has sexual relations, growing out of his visits to the monks⁴. Xaviera has relations with the monks of the Carmelite order, to such a degree in fact, that one may expect to learn through her the secrets divulged in the confessional⁵. The bishop is a party to base intrigue and brings his influence to bear to rob Piachi, Nicolo's foster-father, of his estate and to turn it over to Nicolo in turn for the latter's promise to marry Xaviera, whom the bishop now desires to be rid of. Piachi, aware of such misdeeds on the part of the clergy, refuses to accept absolution from the priest, and, bent upon revenge, prefers to follow Nicolo to the bottoms of hell where he can continue his vengeance. Yet it cannot be said that Kleist reveals any tendency to decry the Catholic church in these stories; he merely weaves in these threads as impartially as he does any others. As Herzog affirms⁶: „Kleist war als Künstler von allen katholisierenden wie rationalistischen Tendenzen gleichweit

¹ Reinhold Steig: H. v. Kleist's Berliner Kämpfe, p. 531. — ² Ibid., p. 532. — ³ V, 130, 9. — ⁴ III, 361, 5. — ⁵ III, 372, 3. — ⁶ Wilhelm Herzog: Heinrich von Kleist; Sein Leben und sein Werk. p. 603.

entfernt. Er polemisierte nicht. Und so wenig er die Kirche beleidigen wollte, wenn er im „Findling“ die Kurtisane Xaviera Tartini als Beischläferin ihres Bischofs bezeichnet, sowenig verteidigt oder glorifiziert er jetzt ihre Einrichtungen, wenn er die Gewalt der italienischen Musik auf die Gemüter der Gläubigen und Ungläubigen schildert.“

After his break with philosophy, Kleist lost confidence in the supremacy of reason, as has been indicated, and desired the ability to believe. Kayka observes on this point¹: „Dahmals, als er sich überzeugt hatte, daß wir nichts wissen können, daß unser Verstand zu schwach ist, um „die Welt und das, was sie zusammenhält“, zu ergründen, da resignierte er; und andere Kräfte erwachten in seiner Seele zu immer mächtigerem Leben, denen gegenüber ihm der Verstand, der sich bisher die Herrschaft über die Seele angemäßt hatte, arm und ohnmächtig erschien: Gefühl und Phantasie. Sie offenbarten ihm ungeahnte Herrlichkeiten. Er wurde ein großer Dichter, und als solcher schuf er sich seine eigene Religion. Harte Schicksalsschläge ließen ihn demütig und bescheiden werden und gaben ihm eine religiös-weiche Stimmung. Referring to Kleist's letter to Rühle von Lilienstern of Aug. 31, 1806², Kayka continues³: Hier haben wir also wieder seinen alten Sternenglauben, aber mit veränderter Basis: es ist kein Wissen mehr, das auf sicheren Verstandeserkenntnissen ruht, sondern ein echter Glaube, gegründet auf Gefühl und Phantasieanschauung. ... So ist seine Religion ein Ewigkeitshunger“. Thus Kleist is seen to revert to his former notion of man as growing in perfection and continuing throughout eternity on one planet or another; now however, this view is no longer based on a rationalistic foundation. His insistence is still on doing that which is good, on activity in this world. „Komm' laß uns etwas Gutes tun, und dabei sterben“⁴, he writes to his friend Rühle in 1806. Only by showing his worthiness can man proceed onward and upward. Thus does he revert to the thought expressed in September of 1800⁵: „Aber zuweilen, wenn ich meine Pflicht erfüllt habe, erlaube ich mir, mit stiller Hoffnung an einen Gott zu denken, der mich sieht, und an eine frohe Ewigkeit, die meiner wartet.“

¹ Ernst Kayka: Kleist und die Romantik, p. 131. — ² V, 326, 28.

³ Ernst Kayka: Kleist und die Romantik, p. 132. — ⁴ V, 327, 3.

⁵ V, 130, 37.

Immortality.

In view of the marked transformations which Kleist's views underwent in a number of other aspects, it is noteworthy that his conception of immortality seems essentially to have remained unchanged. In the letter to Wilhelmine v. Zenge of March 22, 1801, in which Kleist communicates to her his disillusion through the study of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, we have his own word to the effect that he has hitherto cherished a belief in immortality, in a continued existence upon another star, where man was to profit by the stock of truths already gathered, where that which had remained fragmentary was to attain to perfection, and from whence man was subsequently to proceed to still higher stages of development, thus ultimately approaching divine perfection¹. It will be seen in the development of this theme, that his conception of a continuation in existence upon another star, which Kleist had held from his boyhood days, followed him through life and was not cast away in the crisis over Kant. As Meyer-Benfey maintains in connection with the letter already referred to above²: „Wir würden nun erwarten, daß etwa sein Glaube an das Fortleben nach dem Tode durch Kants Kritik erschüttert wird. Aber keine Spur davon! Weder das restlose Aufräumen mit den Beweisen für die Unsterblichkeit der Seele und die Existenz Gottes in der „Kritik der reinen Vernunft“ noch die Wiederherstellung beider Thesen als Gegenstände des Glaubens in der „Kritik der praktischen Vernunft“ hat einen für uns sichtbaren Eindruck gemacht.“

Various passages from his writings reflect Kleist's belief in immortality. On assuring Wilhelmine that nothing shall cause either one of them to abandon the other, he writes (1800)³: „Werden wir uns scheiden? — Wir nicht, mein liebes Mädchen. Aber einer wird uns freilich scheiden, Einer, der auch schwarz aussehen soll, wie man sagt, ob er gleich kein Priester ist. Doch der scheidet immer nur die Körper.“ Hence he holds that only the body is the prey of death; the real

¹ V, 203, 27. — ² Heinr. Meyer-Benfey: Das Drama Heinrich von Kleists, I, 51. — ³ V, 77, 10.

essence of being, however, is not subject to its power. In another letter to Wilhelmine he says¹: Wie können wir uns getrauen in den Plan einzugreifen, den die Natur für die Ewigkeit entworfen hat, da wir nur ein so unendlich kleines Stück von ihm, unser Erdenleben, übersehen?“ Kleist affirms that not merely does his intuitive feeling assure him of a joyful eternity, but that his reason tends to confirm him in such a belief². He urges his sister Ulrike to be as calm as he in the assurance, that if he can find no place in this world suited to him, then upon another star he may find one so much the better³. To Karoline von Schlieben he writes in much the same vein (1801)⁴: „Ach, liebe Freundin, wenn Sie sich Tränen ersparen wollen, so erwarten Sie wenig von dieser Erde. Sie kann nichts geben, was ein reines Herz wahrhaft glücklich machen könnte. Blicken Sie zuweilen, wenn es Nacht ist, in den Himmel. Wenn Sie auf diesem Sterne keinen Platz finden können, der Ihrer würdig ist, so finden Sie vielleicht auf einem andern einen um so bessern.“ In a letter to Christoph Martin Wieland (1807) he also mentions life on another star as supplementing that on this globe⁵. Life beyond the grave is referred to again in a letter to Ulrike, in which he writes (1809)⁶: „Dein Name wird das letzte Wort sein, das über meine Lippen geht, und mein erster Gedanke, (wenn es erlaubt ist) von jenseits zu dir zurückkehren.“ That in death the soul merely leaves the earth is implied in the following statement⁷: „Ich will mich nicht mehr übereilen — tue ich es noch einmal, so ist es das letztemal — denn ich verachte alsdann meine Seele oder die Erde, und trenne sie.“ But though body and soul are frequently in contradiction with each other, he maintains they are loath to separate⁸.

About the eternal perpetuation of existence, of which life on this earth is but one stage and perhaps not even the initial one, Kleist writes at some length to his friend Otto August Rühle von Lilienstern in 1806. His thoughts are as follows⁹: „Denke nur, diese unendliche Fortdauer! Myriaden von Zeiträumen, jedweder ein Leben, und für jedweden eine Erscheinung, wie diese Welt! Wie doch das kleine Sternchen heißen

¹ V, 127, 24. Cf. also V, 129, 14. — ² V, 130, 37. — ³ V, 171, 7.

⁴ V, 239, 8. — ⁵ V, 362, 15. — ⁶ V, 387, 31. — ⁷ V, 250, 28.

⁸ V, 271, 8. — ⁹ V, 326, 30.

mag, das man auf dem Syrius, wenn der Himmel klar ist, sieht? Und dieses ganze ungeheure Firmament nur ein Stäubchen gegen die Unendlichkeit! O Rühle, sage mir, ist dies ein Traum? Zwischen je zwei Lindenblättern, wenn wir abends auf dem Rücken liegen, eine Aussicht, an Ahnungen reicher, als Gedanken fassen, und Worte sagen können. Komm, laß uns etwas Gutes tun, und dabei sterben! Einen der Millionen Tode, die wir schon gestorben sind, und noch sterben werden. Es ist, als ob wir aus einem Zimmer in das andere gehen. Sieh, die Welt kommt mir vor, wie eingeschachtelt; das kleine ist dem großen ähnlich. So wie der Schlaf, in dem wir uns erholen, etwa ein Viertel oder Drittel der Zeit dauert, da wir uns, im Wachen, ermüden, so wird, denke ich, der Tod und aus einem ähnlichen Grunde, ein Viertel oder Drittel des Lebens dauern. Und grade so lange braucht ein menschlicher Körper zu verwesen. Und vielleicht gibt es für eine ganze Gruppe von Leben noch einen eignen Tod, wie hier für eine Gruppe von Durchwachungen (Tagen) einen.“ Kayka notes the following difference in the points of view expressed in the above passage and in Kleist's conceptions prior to his crisis over Kant¹: „Hier haben wir also wieder seinen alten Sternenglauben, aber mit veränderter Basis: es ist kein Wissen mehr, das auf sicheren Verstandeserkenntnissen ruht, sondern ein echter Glaube, gegründet auf Gefühl und Phantasieanschauung.“ Kleist also refers to death as the eternal refrain of life², thereby implying a continued existence beyond death. The thought of death as a period of rest, which ushers the spirit into another life, is implied in Sylvester von Schroffenstein's words after he has just recovered from a fainting spell³: „Mir ist so wohl, wie bei dem Eintritt in ein andres Leben.“ The notion that death is but the cradle or beginning of another life is further expressed in „Das Käthchen von Heilbronn“ where Brigitte attributes these words to Graf vom Strahl⁴: „Die Welt nannt' er ein Grab, und das Grab eine Wiege, und meinte, er würde nun erst geboren werden.“

Accordingly, death is not the final end of all existence, but resembles sleep, in that it leaves the spirit, the real essence of being, refreshed for a resumption of effort on a higher

¹ Ernst Kayka: Kleist und die Romantik, p. 132. — ² V, 342, 15.

³ I, 54, 864. — ⁴ II, 231, 22.



level of perfection, where that which has remained imperfect and incomplete elsewhere, shall subsequently be developed into higher, purer form. The effect of such an interpretation of immortality upon life and effort here and now is very significant as sketched by Kleist. It permits of no mere idle contemplation of exalted heights apparently forever closed to man, but carries with it the insistence upon active endeavor to approach such perfection. Upon this point Kleist expresses himself emphatically, urging that life here and now, life in the present, is vitally important. To reflect upon the purpose of our whole eternal existence, he says¹, is fruitless and often perilous. And since man can understand what he is to do for life in this world, and cannot know what he is to do for eternity, his main concern is to be the fulfillment of his destiny here². It is when he has the conviction of having done his duty, that he allows himself to indulge in the quiet trust in God and a blissful eternity³. Only by living for the moment, he writes, does man live for the future⁴. Such a view of immortality is essentially a healthy, vigorous and buoyant one, for instead of teaching man to be in the world though not of it, it rests on the hope of a happier lot elsewhere, which is to be attained only through unceasing endeavour.

Kleist seems to have believed in the maintenance of individual identity and of personal integrity after death, rather than in an absorption of all individual differences into the infinite. For man was to use on a higher plane of existence the store of truths which he had restlessly striven for and acquired here⁵. Thus the insight gained here was to benefit the individual in a later stage of being. Consequently during the last days of his life Kleist expresses the desire and the expectation of meeting in the great beyond those endeared to him. He writes to Marie von Kleist⁶: „Lebe wohl! Du bist die Allereinzige auf Erden, die ich jenseits wieder zu sehen wünsche.“ Another expression of this same desire is addressed to her a day or two later⁷: „Ach, meine teure Freundin, möchte Dich Gott bald abrufen in jene bessere Welt, wo wir uns alle, mit der Liebe der Engel, einander werden ans Herz drücken können.“

¹ V, 127, 18; also V, 129, 3. — ² V, 129, 22. — ³ V, 130, 37.

⁴ V, 225, 14. — ⁵ V, 203, 32. — ⁶ V, 433, 12. — ⁷ V, 436, 15.

More firmly than ever, Kleist seems to have cherished his ideal of immortality during the period of exultation immediately preceding his death. He seems to have desired to die in order to reach all the more quickly another star, on which the continuation of gradual perfection might be accomplished. For he writes to Marie von Kleist less than a fortnight prior to his death¹: „Ich sterbe, weil mir auf Erden nichts mehr zu lernen und zu erwerben übrig bleibt.“ Kayka expresses himself on this point as follows²: „Da sah er nun wie Plato die Kette der Geister unablässig auf- und niedersteigen und fühlte sich selbst als ein Glied dieser Kette, ein unterstes Glied, das allzulang in der Tiefe zu zögern schien. Aber bis zur Tür des Todes, durch die es hindurch muß, ist es noch weit. Warum nicht in Gemeinschaft mit einem lieben Freunde im Sprunge die Strecke durchheilen und hindurchstürmen hinauf zu höheren, besseren Sternen, wo ihm der Platz zuteil werden würde, der ihm hier versagt zu sein schien, wo er für zahllose Rätsel die ersehnte Lösung finden wird?“ In this spirit, then, he and Henriette Vogel started on their „große Entdeckungsreise“³. It is the spirit underlying the words of Herr Friedrich in „Der Zweikampf“, who says to Littegarde⁴: „Im Leben laß uns auf den Tod, und im Tode auf die Ewigkeit hinaus sehen.“ And this same feeling of having freed himself from the dross of this world, of being purged and purified, is foreshadowed in Homburg's vision of death and immortality, as revealed in his words⁵:

„Nun, o Unsterblichkeit, bist du ganz mein!
 Du strahlst mir, durch die Binde meiner Augen,
 Mit Glanz der tausendfachen Sonne zu!
 Es wachsen Flügel mir an beiden Schultern,
 Durch stille Ätherräume schwingt mein Geist;
 Und wie ein Schiff, vom Hauch des Winds entführt,
 Die muntre Hafenstadt versinken sieht,
 So geht mir dämmernd alles Leben unter:
 Jetzt unterscheid' ich Farben noch und Formen,
 Und jetzt liegt Nebel alles unter mir.“

Thus at the time of his death, Kleist's conception of having completed what this life demanded of him, of having learned


¹ V, 433, 11. — ² Ernst Kayka: Kleist und die Romantik, p. 133.

³ V, 437, 18. — ⁴ III, 419, 20. — ⁵ III, 124, 1830.

and acquired what this world has to bestow, strengthened his belief in the immortality of his spirit.

God.

Kleist's letters as well as his poetical writings abound in reference to God. As early as 1792 there is mention of the God of Love¹, and of faith in God², which, as Kleist maintains in a youthful poem, nothing can shake. And but a few days before his death, he writes to Marie von Kleist, that he now kneels down morning and night, praying to God, an act of devotion which prior to that time had been an impossibility for him³. Thus early and late in his life, as well as at frequent moments intervening, Kleist mentions God. Whatever notion concerning the nature of God and of his relation to man is called forth by the changing emotions of Kleist, he seems quite constant in the belief in the existence of a living God, whose influence makes itself felt in the terrestrial realm, now manifesting itself in one manner, now in another. His firm conviction in the existence of a God stands out in a most sacred promise to Wilhelmine von Zenge, to the effect that as truly as God lives above him, he will never deceive her⁴. He finds a quiet trust in a God who sees him and the contemplation of a happy eternity that awaits him, a most comforting belief; a belief to which he is drawn by a faith of which his heart assures him and which his reason tends to confirm rather than to deny⁵. Kayka states: „Kleist glaubte an einen lebendigen, unvorstellbaren Gott als den Grund alles Seins“⁶.



The idea indicated in the last quotation, of God as being inconceivable, unfathomable and not to be gauged by mere man, stands out repeatedly in the writings of Kleist, who felt that man could neither comprehend God nor clearly understand his decrees and ways. In a letter written at the age of 21 to his former teacher Martini, he tries to make clear to the latter what his idea of virtue is, but confesses frankly that he is at just as great a loss to define what he is writing

¹ IV, 12, 4. — ² IV, 12, 7. — ³ V, 435, 25. — ⁴ V, 102, 20.

⁵ V, 131, 1. — ⁶ Ernst Kayka: Kleist und die Romantik, p. 135.

of, as the Philistines of his day, who speak of God without being able to conceive or define him¹. His conception of God, as well as theirs, was as vague as that of virtue, which he describes as follows²: „Sie (die Tugend) erscheint mir nur wie ein hohes, erhabenes, unnennbares Etwas, für das ich vergebens ein Wort suche, um es durch die Sprache, vergebens eine Gestalt, um es durch ein Bild auszudrücken. Und dennoch strebe ich diesem unbegriffenen Dinge mit der innigsten Innigkeit entgegen, als stünde es klar und deutlich vor meiner Seele. Alles was ich davon weiß, ist, daß es die unvollkommenen Vorstellungen, deren ich jetzt nur fähig bin, gewiß auch enthalten wird; aber ich ahnde noch etwas Höheres, und das ist es wohl eigentlich, was ich nicht ausdrücken und formen kann.“ That this conception of virtue may very well apply to his idea of God is all the more apparent from his reference to „Tugend“ as „Gottheit“³, and to God as the acme of virtue and perfection⁴. On another occasion he writes of the inability of man to fathom the plan which God designed from all eternity, saying⁵: „Wie kann irgend eine gerechte Gottheit von uns verlangen, in diesen ihren ewigen Plan einzugreifen, von uns, die wir nicht einmal im Stande sind, ihn zu denken?“ If man cannot understand the plan of the Godhead, it is obvious enough, that much less can he understand God himself. That it is impossible for man to conceive the divine is further set forth in this statement⁶: „Daß ein Gott sei, daß es ein ewiges Leben, einen Lohn für die Tugend, eine Strafe für das Laster gebe, das alles sind Sätze, die in jenem (erfülle deine Pflicht) nicht gegründet sind, und die wir also entbehren können. Denn gewiß sollen wir sie nach dem Willen der Gottheit selbst entbehren können, weil sie es uns selbst unmöglich gemacht hat, es einzusehen und zu begreifen.“ In writing of an accident which almost caused his life to come to an untimely, violent end, he says⁷: „Das wäre die Absicht des Schöpfers gewesen bei diesem dunkeln rätselhaften irdischen Leben? Das hätte ich darin lernen und tun sollen und weiter nichts? ... Wozu der Himmel es mir gefristet hat, wer kann es wissen?“ This same inability of man to comprehend God is reflected in the words of Sylvester von Schroffen-

¹ V, 27, 26. — ² V, 27, 30. — ³ IV, 59, 24; V, 27, 19. — ⁴ V, 153, 7.

⁵ V, 129, 18. — ⁶ V, 130, 28. — ⁷ V, 243, 26.

stein¹: „Ich bin dir wohl ein Rätsel? Nicht wahr? Nun, tröste dich; Gott ist es mir.“ Yet at another time Sylvester speaks of a single God², who demands that he be worshipped as such. Nevertheless he feels unable to understand God's intentions, as is revealed by the exclamation³: „Gott der Gerechtigkeit! Sprich deutlich mit dem Menschen, daß er's weiß auch, was er soll!“ In 1806 Kleist voices his inability to conceive God, in a letter to Rühle von Lilienstern⁴: „Es kann kein böser Geist sein, der an der Spitze der Welt steht; es ist ein bloß unbegriffener!“ He writes again⁵: „Doch wer weiß, wie es die Vorsicht lenkt,“ thereby implying the same lack of knowledge of the ways of Providence.

With regard to the possibility of a pantheistic conception of the deity, Kleist's letters reveal but one passage to which any weight might be attributed⁶: „Große, stille, feierliche Natur, Du, die Cathedrale der Gottheit, deren Gewölbe der Himmel, deren Säulen die Alpen, deren Kronleuchter die Sterne, deren Chorknaben die Jahreszeiten sind, welche Düfte schwingen in den Rauchfässern der Blumen gegen die Altäre der Felder, an welchen Gott Messe lieset und Freuden austeilt zum Abendmahl unter der Kirchenmusik, welche die Ströme und die Gewitter rauschen, indessen die Seelen entzückt ihre Genüsse an dem Rosenkranze der Erinnerung zählen.“ Brahm refuses to see pantheistic expressions in Kleist other than a solitary one in the words of Jupiter⁷ in „Amphitryon“ and says⁸: „Hier allein finden wir den pantheistischen Zug bei Kleist; er mag ihm aus Eindrücken seiner Studentenzeit emporgetaucht sein.“ Meyer-Benfey also denies the logic of a pantheistic interpretation of various passages⁹ in Amphitryon and maintains¹⁰ that Jupiter is not the God of Pantheism, not the God of religion, but merely the Zeus of mythology. For Kleist's view of man's inability to think or to conceive God, it is important to note in this same drama, what he lets Alkmene say in answer to the following question of Jupiter¹¹:

¹ I, 72, 1213. — ² I, 150, 2576. — ³ I, 151, 2609. — ⁴ V, 326, 28.

⁵ V, 330, 17. — ⁶ V, 257, 14. — ⁷ I, 265, 1421—1428.

⁸ Otto Brahm: *Das Leben Heinrichs von Kleist*, p. 167.

⁹ I, 258, 1266; 265, 1421; 309, 2296.

¹⁰ Heinrich Meyer-Benfey: *Das Drama Heinrich von Kleists*, I, p. 353, 354, 362. — ¹¹ I, 266, 1447.

„Wer ist's, dem du an seinem Altar betest?
 Ist er's dir wohl, der über Wolken ist?
 Kann dein befangner Sinn ihn wohl erfassen?
 Kann dein Gefühl, an seinem Nest gewöhnt,
 Zu solchem Fluge wohl die Schwingen wagen?
 Ist's nicht Amphitryon, der Geliebte, stets,
 Vor welchem du im Staube liegst?“

Alkmene's reply is in part¹:

„Soll ich zur weißen Wand des Marmors beten?
 Ich brauche Züge nun, um ihn zu denken.“

Thus man who cannot understand the nature and being of God, endows him with human attributes and qualities, primarily with those that he deems noble and worthy of admiration. God is a spirit incomprehensible to man; he is a riddle to Kleist as he is to Sylvester von Schroffenstein, and to such mysteries apply the words of Ottokar²: „Es sollen Geheimnisse der Engel Menschen nicht ergründen.“

Kleist apparently views Providence as the creator of this world, for in speaking of all things in this world, he says³: „Es ist nicht genug, daß der Himmel sie erschaffen hat, er muß sie auch unterhalten, wenn sie fort dauern sollen.“ The same thought that God is the creator of beings, the source of their strength and ability to maintain themselves is reflected in the words of Sylvester von Schroffenstein⁴:

„Was mich freut,
 Ist, daß der Geist doch mehr ist, als ich glaubte,
 Denn flieht er gleich auf einen Augenblick,
 An seinen Urquell geht er nur, zu Gott,
 Und mit Heroenkraft kehrt er zurück.“

In a letter to Wilhelmine von Zenge, he speaks of the Creator of this mortal life⁵. In „Amphitryon“, Kleist gives expression to the idea of God as the creator of the world⁶: „Ist er dir wohl vorhanden? Nimmst du die Welt, sein großes Werk, wohl wahr?“

Besides such statements as the above which refer to God as the creator of man and the things of the earth, there are repeated expressions in Kleist's writings of the idea, that a divine purpose is manifest in this world. He speaks of the

¹ I, 267, 1456. — ² I, 26, 316. — ³ V, 61, 10. — ⁴ I, 56, 896.

⁵ V, 243, 27. — ⁶ I, 265, 1420.

plan which nature made for all eternity¹, and does not seem to doubt the existence of a definite eternal plan of the God-head just because mere man with his limitations cannot fathom it, or comprehend more than a limited part of it. He expresses himself more emphatically and distinctly on this point as follows²: „Bestimmung unseres irdischen Lebens heißt Zweck desselben, oder die Absicht, zu welcher uns Gott auf diese Erde gesetzt hat.“ The design of God and the part which is assigned to man in achieving the creator's purpose is dwelt upon elsewhere in these words³: „Nämlich er (der Mensch) ist bestimmt, mit allen Zügen seines künstlichen Instruments einst jene große Composition des Schöpfers auszuführen.“ According to this statement, God is aiming to achieve his ends, to attain his purpose, through the agency of man. On the other hand, during the period of doubt and skepticism through which Kleist passed, he was at a loss to understand what the creator had in mind when he created human life. He says⁴: „Also an einem Eselsgeschrei hing ein Menschenleben? Und wenn es geschlossen gewesen wäre, darum hätte ich gelebt? Das wäre die Absicht des Schöpfers gewesen bei diesem dunkeln, rätselhaften irdischen Leben?“ Yet even here, he does not deny all intention on the part of God, but states his own lack of insight into this mysterious purpose. He feels himself subject to the decree of God⁵, though he cannot foretell what Providence will ordain⁶. Some of the characters of Kleist's creation give voice to similar conceptions of divine purpose and divine decrees. The Kurfürst believes that it rests with God to grant victory⁷, and declares that on the morrow he will thank God before the altar for the splendid victory of the day⁸. In the „Katechismus der Deutschen“ this thought appears again⁹: God is the first lord of hosts, and it is in no man's power, not even in that of the emperor or the archduke to win in accordance with individual desire, for God decides the fortune of battle. But God decides battles with a definite purpose in view; for in his sight it is atrocious that slaves should live¹⁰; man is to be free, the man of spirit is the product that God desires.

¹ V, 129, 17. Sept. 1800. — ² V, 131, 32. — ³ V, 173, 23.

⁴ V, 243, 24, July, 1801. — ⁵ V, 273, 3. — ⁶ V, 330, 17.

⁷ III, 35, 246. — ⁸ III, 66, 729. — ⁹ IV, 111, 29. — ¹⁰ IV, 112, 12.

It is quite evident from many statements to that effect, that back of this element of purpose which Kleist attributes to the deity, there is a kind, benevolent Providence. Qualities such as virtue and happiness, which at an early time in his life seem the most desirable of all, he terms „Gottheiten“¹. He has faith in the benevolence of a God who would not implant the longing for happiness so firmly in the breast of man, if it were but a dream and a delusion, doomed to disappointment². God is kind as well as wise, for „was mit der Güte und Weisheit Gottes streitet, kann nicht wahr sein“³. Moreover God is interested in the well-being of all men without any partiality⁴, and is just⁵. The statements just quoted were made by Kleist at the age of 21 in the „Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden“, in which a firm belief in the goodness and benevolence of the deity is manifest. He refers in a letter to a „just God“⁶, and lets Sylvester von Schroffenstein address the deity as „Gott der Gerechtigkeit“⁷. From God he hopes for the success of his quest on his journey to Würzburg⁸. After his Kant experience, a similar hope manifests itself, namely that God may some time render him able to reward Wilhelmine for her heartfelt sympathy and affection⁹. He affirms that heaven gladly grants fulfillment of those wishes that are in accordance with its designs, and consequently urges Wilhelmine to hope and trust in heaven¹⁰. During his period of gloom and disbelief of all former values, he still makes demands of heaven; he advocates hedonism and asserts that it is the duty of heaven to grant mankind pleasure¹¹. For, he declares, if man never enjoys life, he has the right to ask of the creator: Why didst thou grant me life?¹² When, later on, 1803, he is again in deep gloom because of his failure to bring his contemplated drama Robert Guiskard to a successful end, when he despairs of himself and his ability, he does not attribute his lack of success to Providence, but rather to the infernal powers of hell¹³. Yet he maintains that heaven denied him fame¹⁴, the greatest good of this world. Nevertheless, his general feeling as exemplified in his letters and

¹ IV, 59, 24; V, 27, 19. — ² IV, 58, 7. — ³ IV, 58, 26.

⁴ IV, 58, 27. — ⁵ IV, 58, 31. — ⁶ V, 129, 19. — ⁷ I, 151, 2609.

⁸ V, 82, 12. — ⁹ V, 217, 1. April, 1801. — ¹⁰ V, 218, 2.

¹¹ V, 250, 18. — ¹² V, 250, 16. — ¹³ V, 300, 30. — ¹⁴ V, 301,

his poetical works, is that of a Providence which is benevolent, conferring benefits upon the deserving and punishing the evil.

This same view is reflected in Kleist's works. Sylvester von Schroffenstein states that God sometimes deals severely with man¹; Herr Friedrich, in „Der Zweikampf“, suggests that the direful fall caused by his becoming entangled in his trappings with his spurs, may be the punishment vented upon him by God for his sins². On the other hand, there are numerous passages implying the kind intent of Providence. God is the source of man's strength, fortifying him with heroic power³. Eustache, Gräfin von Schroffenstein, implies the need that man has of God's help when in distress⁴. She further declares that God has shown the way toward conciliation by virtue of the love which he has kindled in the hearts of Ottokar and Agnes⁵. Thus even in this dismal tragedy there is reference to a just Providence on the part of representatives of both of the warring houses. If man cannot follow out the peaceful solution of the strife, which God in his kindness seems to indicate⁶, that does not affect the benevolent intention of God in his attempt to point the way out of the difficulty. It is the weakness of man, who allows unruly passion to deceive him, that is responsible for the calamity.

In „Das Käthchen von Heilbronn“ there is probably to be found Kleist's strongest emphasis on God as a benevolent Providence that aims to aid man in realizing his ends. As Meyer-Benfey maintains⁷: „Es ist nicht ein blindes Fatum und nicht ein tückischer Zufall, sondern das Walten einer guten und planvoll handelnden Macht, einer göttlichen Vorsehung. Daß ein allmächtiger und gütiger Gott das Schicksal der Menschen bestimmt und leitet, daß er auf wunderbaren und unerforschlichen Wegen seine Pläne ausführt und schließlich alles zum Besten lenkt, das ist die Grundstimmung unsers Gedichts“. Käthchen herself terms it a decree of heaven⁸, „Gottes Fügung“, that brought her to prior Hatto's cell at the time when the letter was delivered to him. It was God's decree that enabled her to comprehend the meaning of the note, to snatch it from Hatto's hand, to speed to Thurneck and arrive

¹ I, 59, 965. — ² III, 414, 5. — ³ I, 56, 899. — ⁴ I, 107, 1802.

⁵ I, 117, 1988. — ⁶ I, 117, 1988; I, 128, 2195 and 2203. — ⁷ Meyer-Benfey: Das Drama Heinrichs von Kleist, II, p. 22. — ⁸ II, 254, 18.

!?
yet, if this
is true,
man rejects
God's
hints

just in the nick of time to save Graf vom Strahl from the hand of murderers. And it is divine protection in the form of a cherub¹ that enables her to emerge safe and unharmed from smoke, fire and ruins. Graf Strahl exclaims in the face of this miracle²: „Nun, über dich schwebt Gott mit seinen Scharen!“ Subsequently Käthchen again pronounces it „Gottes Fügung“³ that she has been successful in her search for the document amid ashes and ruins, the document which reveals the selfish plans of Kunigunde to enhance her property at the expense of Strahl. And after Strahl has had his eyes opened, when all obstacles have been cleared away through divine intervention, and the marriage of Strahl to Käthchen is proclaimed, the proclamation ends fittingly with the request that heaven may bless the noble pair⁴, and grant them the full measure of happiness which is in its power to bestow. Käthchen's last words in the drama are an appeal to Providence⁵: „Schütze mich Gott und alle Heiligen!“ „Das Käthchen von Heilbronn“ is a poetic expression of faith in a divine, benevolent Providence which shapes and directs events to the welfare of trusting mankind. Röbbeling sums it up in the pithy statement⁶: „Es ist die Anschauung von Gott als einer gütigen Vorsehung, christlich gefärbt, doch alles Dogmatischen entkleidet und umgedeutet“.

A trust in the kindness and good will of God is to be found in other characters of Kleist's works as well. Hohenzollern relates that Homburg entertains a strong conviction that Providence has granted him a sign of future success⁷. Kohlhaas declares⁸ that God has blessed him with a wife, with children and possessions. The belief that Providence protected the cloister of the pious nuns against the maliciously planned destruction is held in „Die heilige Cäcilie“ by Veit Gotthelf⁹, a party to the conspiracy, by the mother of the conspirators¹⁰, and by the abbess herself¹¹: In „Der Zweikampf“ Frau Littegarde confidently places her fate in the hand of God¹², and is convinced that God will protect the champion of her innocence in battle even if he go into the struggle without helmet

¹ II, 267, 23. — ² II, 269, 4. — ³ II, 274, 3. — ⁴ II, 311, 3.

⁵ II, 312, 4. — ⁶ Friedrich Röbbeling: Kleists Käthchen von Heilbronn, p. 58. — ⁷ III, 116, 1663. — ⁸ III, 163, 13. — ⁹ III, 383, 2.

¹⁰ III, 387, 8. — ¹¹ III, 389, 19. — ¹² III, 409, 10.

and armor¹. Nor does heaven disappoint her, for a special decree of heaven guards Friedrich against mortal wounds², and her innocence ultimately comes to light. Even in the humorous adaptation of Hans Sachs' „Der Welt Lauf“, one reads the assurance of God that he has the welfare of mankind at heart and has mercy upon men in their need³.

It is necessary to consider Kleist's views on the approach of man to the deity. Kleist states directly in a letter to Wilhelmine of March 22, 1801, that hitherto but one motive had dominated his whole activity⁴; his endeavour had been never to rest from his efforts for a single moment, but to continue unceasingly in the pursuit of ever higher stages of development. „Wahrheit und Bildung“ had been his motto. Constant progress in development he had deemed imperative to happiness⁵. He had had no idea of turning his knowledge to account in a practical way⁶, but had been intent upon its pursuit because it was the source of truth. Why then this intentness upon „Bildung“? It was sacred to him as a means of attaining perfection, thereby enabling him gradually to approach the deity, the acme of perfection⁷. Kayka sums up Kleist's early view as follows⁸: „Seinem Genius genügte die erste Stufe zu Gott, Charakterreinheit, nicht; seine Pflicht war es, die Welt zu durchdringen mit allen seinen Kräften und mit einem ungeheueren Schatz von Wahrheiten jene höheren Sterne zu beschreiten, die Gott am nächsten glühen.“ With regard to the basis for the conviction of the existence of the deity which was to be thus approached, the same author writes⁹: „Für ihn war Gott und Unsterblichkeit nicht nur eine Glaubensgewißheit, sondern eine erkannte Wahrheit, wie er später in der durch Kant herbeigeführten Krisis klar ausspricht, eine all sein Tun und Lassen beherrschende Lebensmacht“.


This rationalistic conception, however, makes way for an entirely different one after his catastrophe over Kant. He can no longer approach divine perfection as a result of having amassed a stock of eternal, absolute truths, which render him worthy to draw near to the divine absolute truth. His trust in the ability of man to ascertain truth has been undermined,

¹ III, 409, 23. — ² III, 412, 15. — ³ IV, 48, 89. — ⁴ V, 204, 1.

⁵ V, 170, 27. — ⁶ V, 170, 35. — ⁷ V, 153, 1. — ⁸ Ernst Kayka: Kleist und die Romantik, p. 165. — ⁹ Ibid., p. 47f.

and he says¹: „Wir können nicht entscheiden, ob das, was wir Wahrheit nennen, wahrhaft Wahrheit ist, oder ob es uns nur so scheint. Ist das letzte, so ist die Wahrheit, die wir hier sammeln, nach dem Tode nicht mehr — und alles Bestreben, ein Eigentum sich zu erwerben, das uns auch in das Grab folgt, ist vergeblich.“ With this, his only, his highest goal has been shattered²; all his restless striving is without an objective³. There now ensues a period in which Kleist feels that the best man can do is to limit himself to the things of this world⁴.

In „Käthchen“, however, he seems to have entered upon another stage, in which God is represented as revealing himself to instinctive feeling, to belief, to unquestioning faith rather than reason. In time this view seems to become firmly seated; what had formerly seemed to be revealed by reason as absolute knowledge, now returns as something to be accepted on faith. He again writes of proceeding from this world to a better planet, to a higher perception of things as they are in truth⁵. This reverting back from reason to faith, to intuitive feeling as a means of leading to the divine essence would seem to be implied in the essay „Über das Marionettentheater“⁶: „Wir sehen, daß in dem Maße, als, in der organischen Welt, die Reflexion dunkler und schwächer wird, die Grazie immer strahlender und herrschender hervortritt.“



In „Prinz Friedrich von Homburg“ (1810) Kleist lets the hero enter a chapel and pray in a reverent mood, induced by the sound of the church bells as he is on his way to battle. In his last days under the spell of the mysterious exuberance which had come over Kleist at the thought of his impending journey into vast unknown realms⁷, he felt himself strangely near to the deity, so near that he too, communed with God in prayer⁸, an act of devotion which had been an impossibility for him prior to this time, for him who at a former rationalistic period of his life had written so ironically of faith and prayer⁹. He now writes¹⁰: „Ach, ich versichere Dich, ich bin ganz selig. Morgens und Abends knie ich nieder, was ich nie gekonnt habe, und bete zu Gott; ich kann ihm mein

¹ V, 204, 26. — ² V, 204, 34; V, 205, 9; V, 207, 10. — ³ V, 209, 21.

⁴ V, 250, 13. — ⁵ V, 326, 30. — ⁶ IV, 141, 13. — ⁷ V, 437, 18.

⁸ V, 435, 25. — ⁹ V, 115, 27. — ¹⁰ V, 435, 24.

Leben, das allerqualvollste, das je ein Mensch geführt hat, jetzo danken, weil er es mir durch den . . . und wollüstigsten aller Tode vergütigt.“ Thus in spirit he already felt himself at one with God, with whom he was to be more closely united through the close of life on this terrestrial globe.

Fate and freedom of the will.

Kleist's life reveals to a marked degree the desire to proclaim individual will independent of a fate which mysteriously seems to lead man to an inexorable destiny. The words „Schicksal“ and „Geschick“ occur again and again in his writings, and his mood, as determined by various changes in fortune, voices itself now as triumphant over an outward compelling fate, now as skeptical of the free will of man; at one time he is fairly crushed by the force of apparently unavoidable circumstance, at another he is trying to rise again to a firmness unshaken by the changes of the fleeting moment. From a youthfully enthusiastic and idealistic assertion that man is master of his fate, and in no way dependent upon forces outside of himself as long as he is self-reliant, firm of will and guided by definite purpose, he is plunged into depths, in which he despairs of all ability of the individual to maintain his integrity in the face of an unintelligible fate. His anguish is full of that bitterness peculiar to the temper which is given to introspection and self-analysis. His grief is all the sharper because of the ambition which has been rudely disappointed, because of the sudden disillusionment which has shattered his high hopes. A long struggle ensues, and with subsequent forgetting of self and the placing of his energies in the service of an idea greater than self, there is called forth a faith in his own powers, which makes possible the creation of a character of the firmness of Kurfürst Friedrich Wilhelm, in whom Kleist seems to have embodied a faith in the supremacy of man over fate when he is consecrated to the service of a great and noble purpose. Such devotion to something greater than the individual is the source of moral strength that will not endure a deterministic view which relieves man of responsibility for his conduct.

Kleist's early letters, beginning with the one to his former teacher Martini, show the desire to be independent of outward circumstance. His one wish is to be happy¹, but he feels that its realization must not be dependent upon outward fortune², hence the necessity of basing it upon the enjoyment received from the highest possible development of all his faculties³. He is aware that it is wise and advisable not to rely upon the present order of things in a time of such changefulness⁴, and is convinced that chance and outward circumstance cannot and shall not undermine a happiness which is founded upon inner qualities, upon virtue⁵. Thus he maintains emphatically that reason can and must determine his lot independently of any other forces. Yet in spite of this emphatic declaration, he is keenly conscious of the fact that there are vast numbers of people who do not actively determine their life, but are the victims of chance. This observation he develops at some length⁶: „Tausend Menschen höre ich reden und sehe ich handeln, und es fällt mir nicht ein, nach dem Warum? zu fragen. Sie selbst wissen es nicht, dunkle Neigungen leiten sie, der Augenblick bestimmt ihre Handlungen. Sie bleiben für immer unmündig und ihr Schicksal ein Spiel des Zufalls. Sie fühlen sich wie von unsichtbaren Kräften geleitet und gezogen, sie folgen ihnen im Gefühl ihrer Schwäche wohin es sie auch führt, zum Glücke, das sie dann nur halb genießen, zum Unglück, das sie dann doppelt fühlen.“ Yet he does not deem it necessary for man to be subject to chance, but is confident that reason can raise man far above so contemptible a lot. He continues⁷: „Eine solche sklavische Hingebung in die Launen des Tyrannen Schicksal, ist nun freilich eines freien, denkenden Menschen höchst unwürdig. Ein freier denkender Mensch bleibt da nicht stehen, wo der Zufall ihn hinstößt; oder wenn er bleibt, so bleibt er aus Gründen, aus Wahl des Bessern. Er fühlt, daß man sich über das Schicksal erheben könne, ja, daß es im richtigen Sinne selbst möglich sei, das Schicksal zu leiten. Er bestimmt nach seiner Vernunft, welches Glück für ihn das höchste sei, er entwirft sich seinen Lebensplan, und strebt seinem Ziele nach sicher aufgestellten Grundsätzen mit allen seinen Kräften ent-

¹ V, 26, 14. — ² V, 26, 29. — ³ V, 28, 23. — ⁴ V, 38, 23.

⁵ V, 38, 10. — ⁶ V, 41, 20. — ⁷ V, 41, 28.

gegen. Denn schon die Bibel sagt, willst Du das Himmelreich erwerben, so lege selbst Hand an.“ Kleist was, at this early period of his life, firmly convinced that to be subject to a capricious fate is merely a sign of personal weakness, of infirmity of will, of lack of definite purpose. Reason can and must determine a goal; unceasing and unyielding effort in its pursuit will make man master of his life, unshaken by chance. He has a hearty contempt for such men as are without sufficient backbone to formulate a definite plan for their life and voices his contempt as follows¹: „Ohne Lebensplan leben heißt vom Zufall erwarten, ob er uns so glücklich machen werde, wie wir es selbst nicht begreifen. Ja, es ist mir unbegreiflich, wie ein Mensch ohne Lebensplan leben könne, und ich fühle, an der Sicherheit, mit welcher ich die Gegenwart benutze, an der Ruhe, mit welcher ich in die Zukunft blicke, so innig, welch' ein unschätzbares Glück mir mein Lebensplan gewährt, und der Zustand, ohne Lebensplan, ohne feste Bestimmung immer schwankend zwischen unsichern Wünschen, immer im Widerspruch mit meinen Pflichten, ein Spiel des Zufalls, eine Puppe am Drahte des Schicksals — dieser unwürdige Zustand scheint mir so verächtlich, und würde mich so unglücklich machen, daß mir der Tod bei weitem wünschenswerter wäre.“ Kleist speaks further of man's unhampered freedom of the will² in making a choice of his plan of life and affirms that man is subject alone to the dictates of reason.

There can hardly be a more thoroughgoing assertion of the freedom of the will than the above. Kleist's view that happiness is not dependent upon chance, but upon carefully planned effort and continued striving, is voiced also in a poem to Wilhelmine v. Zenge probably written in the summer of 1800. In the following stanzas this view stands out in full clearness:

„Nicht aus des Herzens bloßem Wunsche keimt
Des Glückes schöne Götterpflanze auf.
Der Mensch soll mit der Mühe Pflugschar sich
Des Schicksals harten Boden öffnen, soll
Des Glückes Erntetag sich selbst bereiten,
Und Taten in die offenen Furchen streun“³.

¹ V, 43, 26. — ² V, 44, 5. — ³ IV, 9, 1.

„Den Bergmann soll die Wünschelrute nicht
Mit blindem Glück an goldne Schätze führen,
Er soll durch Erd' und Stein sich einen Weg
Bis zu des Erzes edlem Gange bahnen,
Damit er an dem Körnchen Gold, das er
Mit Schweiß erwarb, sich mehr, als an dem Schatze
Den ihm die Wünschelrute zeigt, erfreue“¹.

Again Kleist writes as follows on the subject of reason and knowledge as related to happiness and freedom²: „Wie viele Freuden gewährt nicht schon allein die wahre und richtige Wertschätzung der Dinge. Wie oft gründet sich das Unglück eines Menschen bloß darin, daß er den Dingen unmögliche Wirkungen zuschrieb, oder aus Verhältnissen falsche Resultate zog, und sich darinnen in seinen Erwartungen betrog. Wir werden uns seltner irren, mein Freund, wir durchschauen dann die Geheimnisse der physischen wie der moralischen Welt, bis dahin, versteht sich, wo der ewige Schleier über sie waltet, und was wir bei dem Scharfblick unseres Geistes von der Natur erwarten, das leistet sie gewiß. Ja es ist im richtigen Sinne sogar möglich das Schicksal selbst zu leiten, und wenn uns dann auch das große allgewaltige Rad einmal mit sich fortreißt, so verlieren wir doch nie das Gefühl unsrer selbst, nie das Bewußtsein unsres Wertes.“

Only by thoroughly realizing the importance Kleist attached to knowledge as a liberator from the power of fate, as a source of eternal, absolute truths, can one realize how utterly at sea he was when this support was threatened.) The views of his friend Brockes call Kleist's attention to the sharp contrast between knowledge and action and their respective merits³. Whereas Kleist has hitherto unquestioningly accepted knowledge as the means to acquiring all that is worth while in life, he now becomes hesitant, and is in a mood where knowledge and reason, hitherto accepted blindly and impetuously as a means of ruling fate, must pass scrutiny. He writes to Ulrike⁴: „Selbst die Säule, an welcher ich mich sonst in dem Strudel dieses Lebens hielt, wankt —, Ich meine, die Liebe zu den Wissenschaften.“ He is now at sea and unable to support himself, for the foundation on which he had rested,

¹ IV, 11. 45. — ² IV, 67, 31. — ³ V, 188 10. — ⁴ V 198, 6.

is tottering. In this mood he writes to Ulrike again; how strong the feeling of being exposed to chance and accident has grown within him, is revealed by the figure he uses¹: „In meinem Kopfe sieht es aus, wie in einem Lotteriebeutel, wo neben einem großen Loose 1000 Nieten liegen. Da ist es wohl zu verzeihen, wenn man ungewiß mit der Hand unter den Zetteln herumwühlt. Es hilft zwar zu nichts, aber es entfernt doch den furchtbaren Augenblick, der ein ganzes Lebensgeschick unwiderruflich entscheidet“.

Into this period of doubt and wavering comes Kleist's occupation with Kant's „Critique of Pure Reason.“ His hopes are utterly crushed, his goal is shattered, and he is himself reduced to that pitiful condition which he had once described as follows²: „der Zustand, ohne Lebensplan, ohne feste Bestimmung, immer schwankend zwischen unsichern Wünschen, immer im Widerspruch mit meinen Pflichten, ein Spiel des Zufalls, eine Puppe am Drahte des Schicksals — dieser unwürdige Zustand scheint mir so verächtlich, und würde mich so unglücklich machen, daß mir der Tod bei weitem wünschenswerter wäre.“ His letter to Ulrike of March 23, 1801 paints his aimlessness and despair most vividly³.

Kleist has sketched a picture of his helplessness in the face of fate as follows⁴: „Ich habe mich wie ein spielendes Kind auf die Mitte der See gewagt, es erheben sich heftige Winde, gefährlich schaukelt das Fahrzeug über den Wellen, das Getöse übertönt alle Besinnung, ich kenne nicht einmal die Himmelsgegend, nach welcher ich steuern soll, und mir flüstert eine Ahnung zu, daß mir mein Untergang bevorsteht.“ In the same letter, he refers to blind fate and chance in these words⁵: „Doch höre, wie das blinde Verhängnis mit mir spielte.“ And again⁶: „Ach, Wilhelmine, wir dünken uns frei, und der Zufall führt uns allgewaltig an tausend feingespinnenen Fäden fort.“ He writes⁷ of the relentless and mysterious tangle of circumstances that forces him into an act against his will, of a dark future⁸ from which he knows neither what to desire and hope nor what to fear, of heaven which leaves even his most modest wishes unfulfilled⁹. He

¹ V, 199, 18. — ² V, 43, 32. — ³ V, 206, 30. — ⁴ V, 212, 5.

⁵ V, 212, 30. — ⁶ V, 213, 16. — ⁷ V, 217, 14. — ⁸ V, 217, 27.

⁹ V, 219, 12.

feels himself condemned, like Tankred to hurt Wilhelmine whom he loves, by his every act¹. An inexorable fate drives, him hither and thither, and he is powerless to resist or to secure the rest which he craves². In a similar strain he writes³: „Wohin ich dann mich wenden werde, und ob der Wind des Schicksals noch einmal mein Lebensschiff nach Dresden treiben wird —? Ach, ich zweifle daran. Es ist wahrscheinlich, daß ich nie in mein Vaterland zurückkehre. In welchem Welttheile ich einst das Pflänzchen des Glückes pflücken werde, und ob es überhaupt irgendwo für mich blüht? Ach, dunkel, dunkel, ist das Alles.“ His disillusionment vents itself in the words, that to avoid tears one must expect little upon this earth⁴.

Kleist's fatalistic feeling seems to grow in proportion to his unhappiness and restlessness, and gradually comes to a culminating point, which finds expression in several remarkable letters. He describes an accident as follows⁵: „Während Johann in dem Hause war, kommt ein Zug von Steineseln hinter uns her, und einer von ihnen erhebt ein so gräßliches Geschrei, daß wir selbst, wenn wir nicht so vernünftig wären, scheu geworden wären. Unsere Pferde aber, die das Unglück haben, keine Vernunft zu besitzen, hoben sich kerzengrade in die Höhe, und gingen dann spornstreichs mit uns über dem Steinpflaster durch. Ich griff nach der Leine — aber die Zügel lagen den Pferden aufgelöset über der Brust, und ehe wir Zeit hatten an die Größe der Gefahr zu denken, schlug unser leichter Wagen schon um, und wir stürzten — Also an einem Eselsgeschrei hing ein Menschenleben?“ Und wenn es geschlossen gewesen wäre, darum hätte ich gelebt? Das wäre die Absicht des Schöpfers gewesen bei diesem dunkeln rätselhaften irdischen Leben? Das hätte ich darin lernen und tun sollen, und weiter nichts? Doch, noch war es nicht geschlossen. Wozu der Himmel es mir gefristet hat, wer kann es wissen?“ In the same letter he gives voice to very pessimistic reflections on life⁶, in which he declares that man stands under the domination of an incomprehensible power, whose ends cannot be discerned, and whose reign over the destiny of man is arbitrary and absolute, forcing man to continue in an

¹ V, 221, 22. — ² V, 230, 16. — ³ V, 238, 22. — ⁴ V, 239, 8.

⁵ V, 243, 15. — ⁶ V, 244, 25—245, 11.

existence which is unfathomable to him. The instinctive law of preservation which is nature's decree and which reason cannot transcend, makes man fear to end a life which is valueless to him.

Along with his utter skepticism of the ability of man to discover truth comes the feeling that man cannot be held responsible for his acts and that evil is not absolute, but merely relative. He writes to Wilhelmine on August 15, 1801¹: „Jede (Wissenschaft) reicht uns Tugenden und Laster, und wir mögen am Ende aufgeklärt oder unwissend sein, so haben wir dabei so viel verloren, als gewonnen. Und so mögen wir denn vielleicht am Ende tun, was wir wollen, wir tun recht — Ja, wahrlich, wenn man überlegt, daß wir ein Leben bedürfen, um zu lernen, wie wir leben müßten, daß wir selbst im Tode noch nicht ahnden, was der Himmel mit uns will, wenn niemand den Zweck seines Daseins und seine Bestimmung kennt, wenn die menschliche Vernunft nicht hinreicht, sich und die Seele und das Leben und die Dinge um sich zu begreifen, wenn man seit Jahrtausenden noch zweifelt, ob es ein Recht giebt — kann Gott von solchen Wesen Verantwortlichkeit fordern? Was heißt das auch, etwas Böses tun, der Wirkung nach? Was ist böse? Absolut böse? Tausendfältig verknüpft und verschlungen sind die Dinge der Welt, jede Handlung ist die Mutter von Millionen andern, und oft die schlechteste erzeugt die besten.“

The reflex of this gloomy skepticism, of the questioning of the responsibility of the individual for his deeds, of pessimistic surrender to the compelling power of chance and accident as dominating the order of this world: the reflex of all this is found in the drama „Die Familie Schroffenstein“. In this drama man and human life seem at the mercy of chance. To be sure, reason is obscured by greed, jealousy and suspicion, but this unreliability of reason as a directive, guiding force is what Kleist has begun to distrust; hence both factors, the unreliability of any guiding power, and the potency of chance, figure prominently in this tragedy. As Herzog maintains, „Die Familie Schroffenstein“ has as its germ the following attitude toward life²: „Das Schicksal ist eine unverständ-

¹ V, 248 32. — ² Wilhelm Herzog: Heinrich von Kleist, Sein Leben und sein Werk, p. 200.

liche und despotische Macht, die den Zufall regieren läßt, den blinden, irrsinnigen Zufall. Der herrscht und wütet; würfelt die Menschen durcheinander, ohne Ziel und Zweck, wie im Chaos; hetzt sie aufeinander, läßt sie töten und morden Alles ist Zufall. Ein Zufall vernichtet ein Menschenleben; ein Zufall läßt es geboren werden. . . . Zufall ist Schuld und Zufall ist die Sühne für die Schuld.“

From the triumphant assertion that man can raise himself above fate and direct his course serenely and successfully toward the goal of his choosing, Kleist has fallen to the deepest despair. In spite of his struggles to overcome his despondency, to win back a shadow of former confidence in his strength to determine his own life, his moods are marked by changes, by ups and downs. Even in the letter in which he expresses a relativistic attitude toward existing standards, he alludes to the duty of man to do something good¹, though he is undecided in his own mind just what results that exacts from him. The same need of doing something good is voiced in a letter written but a few weeks later². He is firmly resolved to pay this debt as he terms it, but is still in a quandary as to the mode of doing so³. Yet on another occasion, he again states his feeling that at times there is no other course open to man than that of doing evil⁴. His nemesis is his „Gemüt“⁵, which prevents his enjoying the things that exist. Thus he would seem to imply that his lot is not determined by an unintelligible fate opposing him from outside, but by his own peculiar nature. This period of his life is one of strange contradictions, which are manifest in his expressions on the theme of fate. Thus he affirms⁶ that his fate was decided prior to his birth and that he was born and destined to lead a quiet, obscure, unimportant existence. On another occasion he again alludes to his „Gemüt“ as his fate⁷. During the comparatively serene sojourn on the Aarinsel near Thun, he states that it is his nature to cause himself unhappy thoughts⁸. He desires merely the fulfillment of one wish⁹, namely the completion of his „Robert Guiskard“; after that he is indifferent to his fate. In April 1803, he writes to his friend Heinrich

¹ V, 250, 20. — ² V, 259, 7. — ³ V, 259, 20. — ⁴ V, 269, 3.

⁵ V, 271, 32. — ⁶ V, 275, 24. — ⁷ V, 279, 16. — ⁸ V, 287, 5.

⁹ V, 291, 6.

Lohse¹, that his fate is approaching a crisis. The meaning of this communication becomes clear by referring to a letter to Ulrike, dated October 5, 1803, in which he admits his failure to complete his drama „Robert Guiskard“, and subsequently deploras his sad fate in these words²: „Ist es aber nicht unwürdig, wenn sich das Schicksal herabläßt, ein so hilfloses Ding, wie der Mensch ist, bei der Nase herum zu führen? Und sollte man es nicht fast so nennen, wenn es uns gleichsam Kuxe auf Goldminen gibt, die, wenn wir nachgraben, überall kein echtes Metall enthalten? Die Hölle gab mir meine halben Talente, der Himmel schenkt dem Menschen ein ganzes, oder gar keins.“ He deems himself fortunate to be able to escape the full force of the blows dealt by an inexorable fate, which is relentlessly pursuing him, ever at his heels³. He warns his friend Pfuel against fate, saying⁴: „Wirf dich dem Schicksal nicht unter die Füße, es ist ungroßmütig, und zertritt dich.“ But opposed to these gloomy fatalistic statements, he writes somewhat later, August 31, 1806⁵: „Es kann kein böser Geist sein, der an der Spitze der Welt steht; es ist ein bloß unbegriffener!“ Yet in June 1807, he still refers to the power of fate in this world, while describing a painting of a dead child, which through death has escaped from the hands of fate⁶.

After this sketch of Kleist's statements about fate as gleaned from his letters, it now remains to find their reflex in his works and notably to delineate his attitude toward this problem in the closing years of his life, inasmuch as the last passage quoted from his letters⁵ is dated June 1807.

It has already been indicated that the tragedy „Die Familie Schroffenstein“ was written at a time when Kleist was overwhelmed by the feeling that a cruel fate was dashing him from pillar to post, making any effort at self-determination absolutely futile. Out of such a view sprang the culmination of this tragedy, which shows the destruction of Ottokar and Agnes as a result of the futility of human reason to cope with bewildering, deceiving circumstances when the mind is clouded by passion and distrust. A mysterious fate hovers over the single scene from „Leopold von Österreich“ as reported

¹ V, 296, 32. — ² V, 300, 26. — ³ V, 309, 27. — ⁴ V, 316, 33.

⁵ V, 326, 28. — ⁶ V, 342, 30.

by Pfuel¹. When the dice are cast, each knight in turn is confronted by the grim spectre of death. The sharp contrast between the original boisterous spirits of the knights at the gaming board, and the gloom which prevails at the outcome of their game of chance is a strong reminder of Kleist's plunge from confidence during the optimistic period of his youth, in the supremacy of reason and will, to the despondency and pessimism coming in the train of his disillusionment.

In „Robert Guiskard“, as far as can be conjectured from the fragment extant, Kleist has portrayed not the passive submission to impending fate, but a wild rebellion against it by a powerful character whose career has known no thwarting by fate or outward circumstance. Abelard says of Guiskard²: „Doch sein Geist bezwingt sich selbst und das Geschick.“ These words are seconded by Guiskard's own statement³, which Erich Schmidt terms a fatalistic defiance⁴: „Ich wehre mich — Im Lager hier kriegt ihr mich nicht ins Grab: In Stambul halt' ich still, und eher nicht!“ He defies the pest itself in the assurance that no illness has as yet been able to overcome him, and says⁵: „Und wär's die Pest auch, so versichre ich euch: An diesen Knochen nagt sie selbst sich krank!“ He assures his people further, that this defiance is not mere „Leichtsinn“, but has its own peculiar reason⁶. To conjecture as to the outcome of Guiskard's fatalistic defiance would be mere idle speculation not to be indulged in this investigation; suffice it to say that Guiskard's attitude is not one of crushed hopelessness and submission, but one of wild rebellion against what seems to be impending doom.

In „Penthesilea“ Kleist introduces the thought which has already been quoted from his letters to the effect that man's „Gemüt“ is his fate. The high priestess affirms that nothing external, no decree of fate, no outward circumstance binds Penthesilea, that it is merely her deluded heart which stands in her way⁷. But Prothoe replies: „Das (ihr Herz) ist ihr Schicksal!“⁸ Prothoe asserts that no matter what fate may befall Penthesilea, they will both compose themselves and bear it⁹; thus she points to a resigned submission to the inevit-

¹ Cf. Otto Brahm: Das Leben Heinrichs von Kleist, 1911, p. 113.

² I, 186, 396. — ³ I, 188, 446. — ⁴ I, 167, 8. — ⁵ I, 189, 464.

⁶ I, 189, 477. — ⁷ II, 77, 1280. — ⁸ II, 78, 1281. — ⁹ II, 96, 1584.

able. In announcing Achilles' challenge to Penthesilea for battle, the herald proclaims that the sword, the metallic tongue of fate, is to decide their lot¹. The high priestess voices her deterministic view in the words: „Ihr Ew'gen! Was beschloßt ihr über uns?“² Penthesilea accuses treacherous gods of interfering and directing the arrow from her hand too close to the heart of her opponent in battle³. Penthesilea's heart is her fate, her fate is death caused by the overwrought feeling which alone is sufficient to kill her without dagger or poison. Thus her fate, which is the outgrowth of her nature, is realized.

In the „Hermannsschlacht“, there is repeated allusion to fate on the part of the Romans. In answer to the prophecy of the witch, Varus replies with downcast mood⁴: „Sie hat des Lebens Fittig mir mit ihrer Zunge scharfem Stahl gelähmt!“ He fears the fate which Marbod proclaims to his generals as being the lot of the Roman legions⁵:

„Die Nornen werden ein Gericht,
Des Schicksals fürchterliche Göttinnen,
Im Teutoburger Wald, dem Heer des Varus halten.“

Varus has had a similar fateful foreboding that Marbod and Hermann are united to destroy him⁶:

„Beim Styx, ich glaubt' es noch; ich hab's schon vor
drei Tagen,
Als ich den Lippstrom überschiff, geahnt.“

Again he says⁷:

„Hier war ein Rabe, der mir prophezeit,
Und seine heisre Stimme sprach: das Grab!“

Varus accepts his fate with the proverbial stoicism of the Roman. Hermann, too, speaks of a fate which rules in the stars⁸, and of omens which predict unfavorable disposition of fate⁹. But he is actively endeavoring to carry out his plan, not idly folding his hands and permitting fate to bring what it may; he feels responsibility, he has a duty to perform toward his race, and this duty inspires him with the determination to risk all in this noble cause. Nor does he fear the

¹ II, 131, 2364. — ² II, 136, 2447. — ³ II, 160, 2889.

⁴ II, 420, 1990. — ⁵ II, 392, 1468. — ⁶ II, 422, 2020.

⁷ II, 423, 2037. — ⁸ II, 342, 432. — ⁹ II, 343, 443.

outcome; he is content in the feeling that he is serving a just and noble cause, he has faith in its success, and this gives him courage and fortitude to bear whatever may befall him. It is with this conviction that he says to Luitgar, whom he has commissioned to carry the message on which all depends¹:

„Du gehst allein; und triffst du mit der Botschaft
Zu spät bei Marbod, oder gar nicht, ein:
Sei's! mein Geschick ist's, das ich tragen werde.“

Thus out of the struggle against a fatalistic conception, which Kleist's letters show, there is born the feeling that, whatever may be the determining factor in man's life, conviction can steel man with courage in the effort to shape his own destiny, and can at the same time give him strength and fortitude to bear whatever life may bring in its train. This stands out in Hermann and is also apparent in the character of the „Marquise von O.“, whose conviction of her innate virtue arms her with strength, and enables her to adjust herself to whatever may come². „Ihr Verstand, stark genug, in ihrer sonderbaren Lage nicht zu reißen, gab sich ganz unter der großen, heiligen und unerklärlichen Einrichtung der Welt gefangen. Sie sah die Unmöglichkeit ein, ihre Familie von ihrer Unschuld zu überzeugen, begriff, daß sie sich darüber trösten müsse, falls sie nicht untergehen wolle, und wenige Tage nur waren nach ihrer Ankunft in V . . . verfloßen, als der Schmerz ganz und gar dem heldenmütigen Vorsatz Platz machte, sich mit Stolz gegen die Anfälle der Welt zu rüsten. Sie beschloß, sich ganz in ihr Innerstes zurückzuziehen, sich, mit ausschließendem Eifer, der Erziehung ihrer beiden Kinder zu widmen, und des Geschenks, das ihr Gott mit dem dritten gemacht hatte, mit voller mütterlicher Liebe zu pflegen.“

In the drama „Prinz Friedrich von Homburg“, Kleist has portrayed two characters whose attitude toward fate is of some importance, inasmuch as it seems to emphasize Kleist's final view of fate. By way of development and contrast he has indicated his ideal. The prince, a dreamer, has a faith in the kindness of fortune, as is to be seen from the following passage³:

¹ II, 361, 859. — ² III, 274, 15. — ³ III, 44, 358.

„Du hast mir, Glück, die Locken schon gestreift:
 Ein Pfand schon warfst du, im Vortüberschweben,
 Aus deinem Füllhorn lächelnd mir herab:
 Heut, Kind der Götter, such' ich, Flüchtiges,
 Ich hasche dich im Feld der Schlacht und stürze
 Ganz deinen Segen mir zu Füßen um.“

This faith, which is born of reckless confidence is destined to be rudely jolted.

The Kurfürst, on the other hand, is characterized in the pithy phrase of Kottwitz¹:

„Es ist der Stümper Sache, nicht die deine,
 Des Schicksals höchsten Kranz erringen wollen;
 Du nahmst bis heüt, noch stets, was es dir bot.“

That is to say, Prinz Friedrich, in his visionary way, has expected to snatch a complete victory; whereas the Kurfürst, mature, seasoned and experienced in this world, copes actively with life and accepts and adjusts himself to whatever falls to his lot as the result of striving. The Kurfürst desires to owe nothing to chance, to fate; he would actively win his share, would win it from the enemy by dint of carefully planned effort. „Den Sieg nicht mag ich, der, ein Kind des Zufalls, mir von der Bank fällt.“² In Prinz Friedrich, Kleist portrayed himself in his struggle for self-mastery; in the Kurfürst he has portrayed that poise, calmness and self-possession which was denied to him, and which he keenly felt was lacking in him. Into this masterful figure, Kleist seems to have cast the strength of will, the indomitable purpose, the capacity for serving a cause with unswerving devotion: in short all those stable qualities, for which he himself had had to wage so disastrous a struggle. Unstinting, unhesitating devotion to a great, common cause, as personified in this character of Kleist's creation, raises the individual above himself, fortifies him and eliminates whims, gives him interests which dominate him and free him from morbid introspection, grounds him so thoroughly in his convictions that he is no prey to outward circumstance, but accepts calmly and serenely whatever comes to him in his efforts for the common weal. Life continues to be a struggle, but man thus fortified accepts his lot as the outcome of his conscious effort.

¹ III, 111, 1547. — ² III, 112, 1566.

Woman.

It is not within the province of this outline to chronicle Kleist's personal relations with various women who played a part in his life; that is the duty of his biographers. What is attempted here, is rather to sketch his views on the nature of woman, her sphere, her part in the world, and her relation to man, on the basis of Kleist's direct utterances in his correspondence, and of an analysis of the women characters who figure prominently in his poetical works.

Kleist is very emphatic in his repeatedly voiced view that the primal duty, „die höchste Bestimmung“¹ of woman is wifehood and motherhood. He terms Ulrike's apparent resolve not to marry, „einen höchst strafbaren und verbrecherischen Entschluß“.² This obligation of woman, which he deems an inviolably sacred one³, is based upon his earnest conviction that propagation of one's kind is the eternal law of nature, sacred because nature's existence depends upon it. In the letter just referred to, dated May 1799, Kleist discourses at some length upon the need of having a definite goal toward which one's efforts are to be directed. Whereas man must weigh the choosing of a goal with the greatest care, due to the many avenues open to his varied talents, woman's career is decided for her by her sex; she has „einen einzigen Lebensplan“ Gattin und Mutter zu werden“⁴. Kleist is convinced that any resolve on the part of woman not to fulfill this sacred obligation will deprive her of her sole means of happiness. For, he says⁵: „Du entsagst mit ihm (dem Entschluß, nicht Mutter zu werden) Deiner höchsten Bestimmung, Deiner heiligsten Pflicht, der erhabensten Würde, zu welcher ein Weib emporsteigen kann, dem einzigen Glück, das Deiner wartet.“ He again emphasizes the duty to the coming generations and the need of perpetuating the noblest and best instincts in them⁷: „Und wenn Mädchen wie Du sich der heiligen Pflicht, Mütter und Erzieherinnen des Menschengeschlechts zu werden, entziehen, was soll aus der Nachkommenschaft werden? Soll die

¹ V, 45, 8. — ² V, 45, 11. — ³ V, 45, 17. — ⁴ V, 45, 1.

⁵ V, 45, 7. — ⁶ V, 46, 32. — ⁷ V, 46, 36.

Sorge für künftige Geschlechter nur der Üppigkeit feiler oder eitler Dirnen überlassen sein? Oder ist sie nicht vielmehr eine heilige Verpflichtung tugendhafter Menschen?“

More than a year after this letter to Ulrike, Kleist repeats his same view to his fiancée, Wilhelmine von Zenge¹. Not only does he set forth the singleness of purpose which is thus ordained for woman, but he also sees a source of comfort in it, inasmuch as it does not subject her to the doubts and contradictions in which the diversity of man's interests involves him². The sacredness with which Kleist viewed the duty of motherhood is expressed nowhere more earnestly than in another letter to Wilhelmine dated a few weeks later³: „O lege den Gedanken wie einen diamantenen Schild um Deine Brust: ich bin zu einer Mutter geboren! Jeder andere Gedanke, jeder andere Wunsch fahre zurück von diesem undurchdringlichen Harnisch. Was könnte Dir sonst die Erde für ein Ziel bieten, das nicht verachtungswürdig wäre? Sie hat nichts was Dir einen Wert geben kann, wenn es nicht die Bildung edler Menschen ist. Dahin richte Dein heiligstes Bestreben! Das ist das Einzige, was Dir die Erde einst verdanken kann. Gehe nicht von ihr, wenn sie sich schämen müßte, Dich nutzlos durch ein Menschen-Alter getragen zu haben! Verachte alle die niederen Zwecke des Lebens. Dieser einzige wird Dich über alle erheben. In ihm wirst Du Dein wahres Glück finden, alle andern können Dich nur auf Augenblicke vergnügen. Er wird Dir Achtung für Dich selbst einflößen, alles andere kann nur Deine Eitelkeit kitzeln; und wenn Du einst an seinem Ziele stehst, so wirst Du mit Selbstzufriedenheit auf Deine Jugend zurückblicken, und nicht wie Tausend andere unglückliche Geschöpfe Deines Geschlechts die versäumte Bestimmung und das versäumte Glück in bitteren Stunden der Einsamkeit beweinen.“

In Wilhelmine, he sees the future mother of his children, as can be seen from the dreams of the future which he pens to her⁴. He admonishes her to continue in her efforts at developing in herself every noble quality, to give her undivided attention to preparing herself for the duties of motherhood⁵ and for representing in her person the type of mother

¹ V, 132, 3. — ² V, 132, 8. — ³ V, 143, 13. — ⁴ V, 105, 7. also V, 143, 1. and V, 144, 28. — ⁵ V, 144, 23.

he desires for his children¹. The duty of woman to train and educate her children, is voiced repeatedly by Kleist. He points out to Ulrike that her duty is to become „Mutter und Erzieherin des Menschengeschlechts“²; draws at some length a mental picture of Wilhelmine instructing her children³, and states her duty to humanity in these words⁴: „Denn der Mensch und die Kenntnis seines ganzen Wesens muß Dein höchstes Augenmerk sein, weil es einst Dein Geschäft sein wird, Menschen zu bilden.“

Just as the mother was to instruct the child, so the husband was to instruct his wife; Kleist felt it to be his duty to inspire his fiancée and to lead her on and up to a higher stage of development. Early in the year 1800 he writes to Wilhelmine that he will endeavor to develop her and to ennoble the girl he loves⁵. A very characteristic utterance on this point dates from the fall of the same year⁶: „Und wäre ein Mädchen auch noch so vollkommen, ist sie fertig, so ist es nichts für mich. Ich selbst muß es mir formen und ausbilden.“ Referring further to his desire to aid Wilhelmine in her mental and spiritual growth, he says⁷: „Ich kenne die Masse, die ich vor mir habe und weiß, wozu sie taugt. Es ist ein Erz mit gediegenem Golde und mir bleibt nichts übrig, als das Metall von dem Gestein zu scheiden.“ His enthusiasm grows and bursts forth in the exclamation⁸: „O wenn ich Dir nur einen Strahl von dem Feuer mitteilen könnte, das in mir flammt! Wenn Du es ahnen könntest, wie der Gedanke, aus Dir einst ein vollkommenes Wesen zu bilden, jede Lebenskraft in mir erwärmt, jede Fähigkeit in mir bewegt, jede Kraft in mir in Leben und Tätigkeit setzt!“ He feels that she is at one with him in this desire for „Bildung“⁹. Of the insistence with which Kleist pursued this role of teacher toward his fiancée, the „Fragen zu Denkübenungen für Wilhelmine von Zenge“¹⁰ of the spring of 1800 give ample evidence. That this role of mentor and pupil was cherished by him with great ardor is revealed by these words¹¹: „O wenn wir einst vereint sein werden, und Du neben mir sitztest, und ich Dich unterrichte, und jede gute Lehre mir mit einem Kusse belohnt wird —

¹ V, 126, 33. — ² V, 46, 36. — ³ V, 143, 4. — ⁴ V, 164, 12.

⁵ V, 58, 21. — ⁶ V, 109, 18. — ⁷ V, 142, 21. — ⁸ V, 142, 31.

⁹ V, 155, 7. — ¹⁰ V, 60 ff. — ¹¹ V, 175, 18.

O weg, weg mit diesen Bildern — und doch ist es das Einzige was ich für diese Erde wünsche.“ He would bring to light her latent qualities¹, but if such efforts were in vain, his ideal of their relationship would be crushed². Thus it is clearly seen from Kleist's early letters, that he considered the relation of husband and wife to be one of mutual aid and stimulation to greater perfection. In this relation, however, man was largely the giver and woman the receiver; it was a case of mentor and pupil.

This view of Kleist is grounded in his belief in the mental superiority of man over woman and the consequent relegation of woman in affairs of the world to a status second to man. In a letter to Ulrike of May 1799, he writes as follows³: „Kannst Du Dich dem allgemeinen Schicksal Deines Geschlechtes entziehen, das nun einmal seiner Natur nach die zweite Stelle in der Reihe der Wesen bekleidet?“ He goes on to point out woman's dependence upon man, her physical weakness, and her need of a strong guiding hand and of a firm support in a life which is full of difficulties to the unprotected woman⁴. Though woman, exactly like man, is subject only to the dictates of reason⁵, as Kleist maintains in his early rationalistic enthusiasm, he holds that mentally she is not man's equal. For all true enlightenment of woman consists in thinking rationally about terrestrial existence; to reflect upon eternity is unprofitable even for men, Kleist writes, thereby implying that it is doubly so for woman⁶. He refers repeatedly to things which women cannot understand⁷. He writes to Wilhelmine, that he cannot expect her to enrich science with new truths such as men have discovered, but that he expects her to develop her mental powers by observation⁸. As a means of instructing women, he deems concrete examples of much more value than abstract discourse⁹. Moreover, he points out to Ulrike, that she is largely concerned with that which is immediately at hand, and shows less inclination to look into the future and to plan constructively for it¹⁰. He distinguishes between the intellect of man and woman as follows¹¹: „Den Mann erkennt man an seinem Verstande; aber wenn man das

¹ V, 127, 14. — ² V, 177, 24. — ³ V, 46, 22. — ⁴ V, 46, 24.

⁵ V, 44, 9. — ⁶ V, 127, 16. — ⁷ V, 152, 9; V, 288, 30. — ⁸ V, 159, 22.

⁹ V, 160, 1. — ¹⁰ V, 42, 27. — ¹¹ V, 233, 14.

Weib nicht an ihrem Herzen erkennt, woran erkennt man es sonst?" Eight years later, in 1809, Kleist reiterates essentially the same thought in his „Satirische Briefe“, where he speaks of a girl, „das, wie man leider weiß, auf die Vernunft nicht mehr hört, wenn das Herz sich bereits für einen Gegenstand entschieden hat“¹. Thus, he deems woman's part in public life small as compared with that of man², and calls her sex „ein leidendes Geschlecht“³, as opposed to the activity of man. Woman has but one purpose to fulfill, namely conformity with nature's demands, whereas man has in addition to meet the demands of the state⁴. Kleist sums up his position tersely in the sentence addressed to Wilhelmine von Zenge in 1800, saying⁵: „Die Frau hingegen ist nichts, als die Frau ihres Mannes; ... die Frau hat keine andern Verpflichtungen als Verpflichtungen gegen ihren Mann; ... das Glück des Mannes ist der einzige Gegenstand der Frau; ... die Frau ist mit ihrer ganzen Seele für ihren Mann tätig, sie gehört niemandem an, als ihrem Manne, und sie gehört ihm ganz an; ... die Frau ist schon glücklich, wenn es der Mann nur ist.“ A further instance of Kleist's rating of woman as compared with the range of man's duties and interests is to be found in the following statement to Wilhelmine in 1800⁶: „Dann könnte ich, ... mein ganzes Leben Ihnen und meinem höchsten Zwecke — oder vielmehr, weil es die Rangordnung so will, meinem höchsten Zwecke und Ihnen widmen.“ His highest aim, as mentioned here, was the acquisition of knowledge and of ultimate truth, to which even his fiancée was subordinated.

Yet in spite of this subordination of woman to an ideal which at that time dominated him so strongly, he has a high regard for love and its ennobling power. „Edler und besser sollen wir durch die Liebe werden, und wenn wir diesen Zweck nicht erreichen, Wilhelmine, so mißverstehen wir uns.“⁷ His love for her is to be the source of inspiration to higher endeavor and ever renewed effort⁸. But a wife will not merely impel him onward in striving for that which is hard to achieve, but will also serve as a safeguard against excesses. He needs

¹ IV, 86, 10. — ² V, 136, 15. dated 1800. — ³ V, 259, 15.

⁴ V, 132, 9; also V, 68, 2. — ⁵ V, 68, 3. — ⁶ V, 59, 26.

⁷ V, 58, 8. — ⁸ V, 60, 11.

7. ver, as he says, „damit ich moralisch gut bleibe“¹. He has been confirmed by numerous observations in the belief that love produces almost incredible changes in men², changes which he enumerates as follows³: „Alles was schön ist und edel und gut und groß, das faßten sie mit offener, empfänglicher Seele auf, es darzustellen in sich; ihr Herz erweiterte sich, die Seele hob sich ihnen unter der Brust, sie umfaßten irgend ein Ideal, dem sie sich verähnlichen wollten.“

The relation of man and woman in matrimony is one on which Kleist expressed himself with great frequency in his letters, and a large portion of the „Denkübungen“, which he prepared for Wilhelmine, deal with this topic. First and foremost, he insists that woman must have absolute confidence and reliance in her husband; there must be no barriers of any kind between them if their union is to be genuinely happy. He writes to Wilhelmine that he would not hesitate to communicate to her a single one of his thoughts or even impulses, and requests the same feeling of confidence from her⁴. „Vertrauen und Achtung“⁵, he terms the inseparable pillars of love, without which it cannot exist. „Vertrauen und Liebe“⁶, „unwandelbares Vertrauen in meine Liebe zu Dir“⁷, unumschränktes Vertrauen“⁸, „blinde Zuversicht an Deinem Vertrauen zu meiner Redlichkeit“⁹, „niemals Mißtrauen oder Bangigkeit, Vertrauen auf uns, Einigkeit unter uns“¹⁰, „bleibe treu, traue fest auf mich“¹¹, „Treue“¹², „Freiwillig und gern mußt Du mir folgen können“¹³: all these are demands typical of his expectation from woman even under most trying situations. His sincerity toward Wilhelmine is quite in accord with such demands¹⁴: „Laß mich ganz aufrichtig sein, liebes Mädchen. Ich will von mir mit Dir reden, als spräche ich mit mir selbst. . . . Du bist nichts anders als ich, und vor Dir will ich nicht besser erscheinen, als vor mir selbst, auch Schwächen will ich vor Dir nicht verstecken. Also aufrichtig und ohne allen Rückhalt.“

In one of his first letters to Wilhelmine, Kleist asks her to tell him her ideal of matrimonial happiness, and adds¹⁵: „Ich verspreche nicht unbedingt den Wunsch zu erfüllen, den

¹ V, 154, 26. — ² V, 178, 32. — ³ V, 179, 23. — ⁴ V, 57, 29.

⁵ V, 57, 37. — ⁶ V, 73, 19. — ⁷ V, 80, 34. — ⁸ V, 83, 1.

⁹ V, 102, 19. — ¹⁰ V, 215, 13. — ¹¹ V, 216, 12. — ¹² V, 242, 37.

¹³ V, 267, 29. — ¹⁴ V, 153, 36. — ¹⁵ V, 60, 8.

Sie mir mitteilen werden; aber ich verspreche bei gleich vortheilhaften Aussichten denjenigen Lebensweg einzuschlagen, der Ihren Wünschen am meisten entpricht.“ The place which woman fills in the life of her husband is dwelt upon at length in a letter of May 1800¹. „Er (der Mann) verliert (bei dem Tode seiner Frau) den ganzen Inbegriff seines irdischen Glücks, ihm ist, mit der Frau, die Quelle alles Glücks versiegt, ihm fehlt alles, wenn ihm eine Frau fehlt, und Alles, was die Frau ihm hinterlassen kann, ist das wehmütige Andenken an ein ehemaliges Glück, das seinen Zustand noch um so trauriger macht.“ He expresses the same view a year and a half later, in October 1801, as follows²: „Der Mann arbeitet; für wen? Für sein Weib. Er ruht aus; wo? bei seinem Weibe. Er trauert; wo? bei seinem Weibe. Er vergnügt sich; wo? bei seinem Weibe. Das Weib ist ihm Alles“. It is not to be wondered at, then, that during his courtship, he sees but a single goal before him, without which he can never be happy upon earth: namely, to enjoy the happiness of matrimony³.

He is much concerned with the danger of man and wife becoming uninteresting and commonplace to each other, with the possibility of their eventually failing to stimulate one another toward that which is worth while. He writes: „Wodurch erwirbt und erhält sich nun wohl eine Frau das Interesse des Mannes?“⁴ His reply is: „Daher wird eine Frau, die sich das Interesse ihres Mannes erhalten will, ihre Talente, wenn sie von der Natur damit beschenkt ist, immer ausbilden und üben müssen, damit der Mann immer bei ihr den Genuß des Schönen finde, den er nie ganz entbehren kann, und den er sonst bei Fremden suchen müßte.“⁵ Thus Kleist places the responsibility for the maintenance of interest and love upon the wife. Similarly he writes of his love for Wilhelmine⁶: „O erhalte sie in der Glut, mein eignes Glück hängt daran, aber von Dir nur hängt es ab.“ Again he writes to her⁷: „Ja, Wilhelmine, meine Liebe ist ganz in Deiner Gewalt..... Denn so wie meine Liebe Dein Werk, nicht das meinige war, so ist auch die Erhaltung derselben nur Dein Werk, nicht das meinige.... Also Sorge nie, daß ich gleichgültig gegen Dich werden möchte, Sorge nur, daß Du mich

¹ V, 68, 34. — ² V, 265, 9. — ³ V, 166, 26. — ⁴ V, 61, 7.

⁵ V, 62, 4. — ⁶ V, 165, 1. — ⁷ V, 201, 3.

nicht gleichgültig gegen Dich machst.“ According to Kleist, then, the means of rendering matrimony permanently happy are in the keeping of the wife.

Though Kleist sees in woman the fundamental source of man's happiness, yet the relation in matrimony is one which demands certain duties from both. He views man as the protector of the weaker sex, as one who can safely and surely guide woman over the difficulties and hardships of life, smoothing out her path before her¹. The thought that they share the same lot is a source of comfort to man and wife², one on which rests the foundation of their union³. Such common sympathy and sharing of happiness and sorrow alike, Kleist holds, will bind man and wife together just as a chord unites tones in harmony⁴. „Mitempfinden“⁵, is the demand he makes. Even though woman is the frailer part of such a union, her influence makes itself felt in curbing the wilfulness of her husband. Kleist illustrates this by the analogy of the turbulent Main River, which is diverted from its course as follows⁶: „Aber ein Rebenhügel beugt seinen stürmischen Lauf, sanft aber mit festem Sinn, wie eine Gattin den stürmischen Willen ihres Mannes, und zeigt ihm mit edler Standhaftigkeit den Weg, . . und er ehrt die bescheidene Warnung und folgt der freundlichen Weisung, und gibt sein voreiliges Ziel auf und durchbricht den Rebenhügel nicht, sondern umgeht ihn, mit beruhigtem Laufe.“ This conviction of Kleist's, of the gentleness, by means of which woman can effectively curb the rash haste of her husband, is reiterated in almost the identical words used above, in a letter to Karoline von Schlieben dated almost a year later, June 1801⁷. That Kleist was aware of the possibility of woman's influence upon state affairs through her husband, is to be gathered from a question which he recommended to Wilhelmine for consideration⁸: „Sind die Weiber wohl ganz ohne allen Einfluß auf die Staatsregierung?“

Kleist's letters also furnish a variety of more general expressions on the traits and qualities of woman, stray, scattered remarks, which when gathered together give a better idea of his conception of woman. He enumerates „Ehre, Reichtum, Wohlleben“ as having a particularly strong charm for women

¹ V, 81, 10. — ² V, 81, 22. — ³ V, 82, 2. — ⁴ V, 161, 20.

⁵ V, 212, 12. — ⁶ V, 145, 14. — ⁷ V, 236, 34. — ⁸ V, 69, 4.

in general¹. He disapproves of the vanity of women whose craving for finery causes them to go „geschmückt“ rather than „bloß angezogen“². Kleist seems to expect greater virtue ✓ from woman than from man. For, in speaking of a crime he writes³: „Sie selbst hat es schon eingestanden, daß sie einen Betrug gespielt habe. Ist es wohl glaublich, daß dies ein Weib sei?“ Unselfishness, which he considers a cardinal virtue to be cultivated and valued above all others, he regards primarily as a feminine quality, for in woman he sees a characteristic unselfish devotion to the happiness of others⁴. On the other hand, no quality makes woman appear more hateful than selfishness and greed⁵. A certain divine kindness is the quality which nature has conferred upon woman⁶; hers is the quality of patience, tolerance, forbearance at the shortcomings and weaknesses of others⁷. A genuine woman is characterized by heartfelt sympathy and by the ability to give comfort in distress. It is these qualities which he misses in Ulrike of whom he says: „Es läßt sich, wie Goethe sagt, nicht an ihrem Busen ruhen“⁸. „Sie ist eine weibliche Heldenseele, die von ihrem Geschlechte nichts hat, als die Hüften, ein Mädchen, das orthographisch schreibt und handelt, nach dem Takte spielt und denkt“⁹. There is too little of the emotional in Ulrike; this is replaced by rationalistic tendencies, which he regards as unfeminine. He regards the desire for a man's love as the greatest need and craving of woman¹⁰, but she shows none of that. Woman does not understand the meaning of ambition¹¹, he writes, but as her nature is not aggressive and active, it would seem quite in keeping therewith that ambition for fame and success, such as Kleist madly desired at that period of his life, should not be a part of her character.

The remarks of Kleist on woman quoted thus far are dated prior to May 20, 1802, on which day he requested Wilhelmine no longer to write to him. It is quite apparent, that his engagement to her, though terminated rather abruptly, was the cause of much reflection on his part concerning the nature and qualities of woman, reflections which were crystallized in the ideas set forth above. Since his later letters

¹ V, 150, 15. — ² V, 184, 9. — ³ V, 54, 16. — ⁴ V, 138, 5.

⁵ V, 138, 7. — ⁶ V, 233, 16. — ⁷ V, 185, 5. — ⁸ V, 227, 15.

⁹ V, 237, 23. — ¹⁰ V, 264, 27. — ¹¹ V, 288, 30.

reveal little or nothing of the kind, it now remains to consider briefly some of the more important women he has created in his writings, and to compare them with his earlier conceptions.

The women in „Die Familie Schroffenstein“ are endowed with much the same qualities that Kleist's early letters have revealed. Thus woman is portrayed as a passive, frail being rather than an active, aggressive one. Eustache hesitates to swear vengeance upon the alleged murderers of her son, saying¹: „Verschone mich, Ich bin ein Weib — O Gott! Wie soll ein Weib sich rächen?“ To this plea, Rupert replies²:

„Ich weiß, Eustache, Männer sind Rächer —
Ihr seid die Klageweiber der Natur.“

He goes on to say that it is woman's nature to love rather than to hate³. Sylvester maintains that woman has no confidence in her own strength, but is of a dependent nature⁴. Ottokar refers to patience as a „Weibertugend“ which costs a man far more effort than action does⁵.

The tendency to discredit woman's powers of understanding is manifest in the words of Sylvester to his wife⁶: „Gertrude — Laß mich — das verstehst du nicht.“ This view of Sylvester's is revealed again in the words of Gertrude, who is aiming to convince her husband that she is right in her suspicions⁷:

„Du hast mir's nie geglaubt, hast die Vermutung,
Gewißheit, wollt' ich sagen, stets ein Deuteln
Der Weiber nur genannt, die, weil sie's einmal
Aus Zufall treffen, nie zu fehlen wännen.“

Thus Sylvester is skeptical of woman's rational faculties and of her judgements. Rupert discredits the authenticity of any rumors coming from women and will believe only a man's statement⁸. The same motif reoccurs in „Prinz Friedrich von Homburg“⁹. Kleist's conception of the husband as the mentor of his wife is reflected in Agnes' words to Ottokar: „Du wirst es lehren“¹⁰.

Ottokar demands the same unquestioning confidence from Agnes that Kleist had expected from Wilhelmine. For he says¹¹:

¹ I, 13, 36. — ² I, 13, 40. — ³ I, 13, 57. — ⁴ I, 56, 893.

⁵ I, 135, 2327. — ⁶ I, 62, 1030. — ⁷ I, 69, 1145. — ⁸ I, 91, 1505.

⁹ III, 106, 1454. — ¹⁰ I, 142, 2433. — ¹¹ I, 49, 770.

„Drum will ich, daß du nichts mehr vor mir birgst,
Und fordre ernst dein unumschränkt Vertrauen.“

In turn Agnes expects the same degree of trustfulness from him¹. Again, Ottokar demands that no element of suspicion come between them, and that she confide in him more than in her father and mother². Agnes promises to be his „in der grenzenlosesten Bedeutung.“³ Similarly Eustache says: „O mein Gemahl, ein Weib glaubt gern an ihres Mannes Unschuld.“⁴ Agnes' devotion to Ottokar reveals itself in the words: „Ein Weib scheut keine Mühe.“⁵ Her pleasure lies in making her lover happy⁶.

Kleist's words to Wilhelmine: „Edler und besser sollen wir werden durch die Liebe“, are reflected in the words of Ottokar to Johann⁷:

„Wie könnte dein Gemüt so häßlich sein,
Da du doch Agnes, Agnes lieben kannst!“

Thus this drama reflects such views of woman as are stated by Kleist in his early letters; this result is but natural, seeing that the work was produced at a time when such impressions, as had come to him during his courtship with Wilhelmine, were most vivid.

In the fragment „Robert Guiskard“ occur no sententious statements about the nature of woman, such as are found in „Die Familie Schroffenstein“; yet in Helena, Kleist has portrayed a woman, who in a case of emergency, rises to the situation, endeavoring to cope with it by an attempt to pacify the subjects of her father⁸. Whether this is the version of 1802 and 1803 or marks a change introduced into the reproduction of the fragment for the „Phoebus“, is of course not to be ascertained from material at hand.

In „Amphitryon“, Alkmene voices in effect the earlier thought⁹ that Ottokar expresses to Agnes¹⁰, that the sacred bond of matrimony alone can justify and sanctify the most intimate relation between the sexes. In the closing words of her question, one seems to hear a faint echo of Kleist's confession to Wilhelmine that he needs a wife „damit ich moralisch gut bleibe“¹¹.

¹ I, 50, 790. — ² I, 81, 1340. — ³ I, 82, 1347. — ⁴ I, 111, 1867.

⁵ I, 46, 718. — ⁶ I, 47, 725. — ⁷ I, 53, 848. — ⁸ I, 172, 62 ff.

⁹ I, 142, 2440. — ¹⁰ I, 222, 459. — ¹¹ V, 154, 26.

Alkmene's words: „Was brauchen wir, als nur uns selbst?“¹ indicate that man and wife are sufficient to each other for happiness; Kleist has expressed this same thought in the poem „Die beiden Tauben“, dedicated to Wilhelmine and her husband in 1808²: „Seid euch die Welt einander selbst und achtet

Nicht eines Wunsches wert das Übrige!“

Again Alkmene's words to Charis reveal what a large part her husband fills in her life and what a place he has in her affections³. On the other hand, the thought that Kleist expressed in his letters, of husband and wife ultimately becoming commonplace and uninteresting to one another, seems to appear again in the words of Merkur to Charis⁴:

„Eilf Eh'standsjahr erschöpfen das Gespräch.“

Virtue is the very essence of Alkmene's being⁵, and upon it rests her peace of mind⁶; if she is no longer pure, she cannot bear to live⁷, for her sense of her own value is lost with the knowledge that she has been defamed⁸. Amphitryon, himself, is absolutely confident of his wife's fidelity and maintains that:

„Zu argem Trug ist sie so fähig just,
Wie ihre Turteltaub“⁹.

Alkmene is not a woman capable of action, her life is one of devotion to her husband and admits of little else.

In „Der zerbrochene Krug“ Kleist has portrayed in the figure of Eve, another woman who is filled with absolute devotion to the man of her choice. In order to save Ruprecht from army service in India, she endures the vilest insults from judge, mother and even lover. In the trial, she refuses to clear her own reputation, which has been jeopardized by her accusers, in order to shield Adam, the judge, and thereby to prevent Ruprecht from being drafted. Though she is not an active being, moulding her own destiny, yet she suffers abuse and endures humiliation for the sake of the man she is devoted to.

In Penthesilea Kleist has portrayed a woman who is aflame with one desire which dominates every fibre of her being: the desire to win the man she loves. The woman in

¹ V, 221, 428. — ² IV, 19, 79. — ³ I, 254, 1161. — ⁴ I, 226, 534.

⁵ I, 255, 1186. — ⁶ I, 241, 873. — ⁷ I, 257, 1243; I, 259, 1278.

⁸ I, 307, 2261. — ⁹ I, 279, 1690.

her has been aroused, her love for Achilles leaves no room for anything else: „Sie denkt nichts als den einen nur“¹. This allconsuming impulse stings woman into action; Eve had suffered and endured, but the heroic strain of the Amazon queen impels her to leave no stone unturned in the active effort to win Achilles. Her determination is expressed in her words²: „Den Ida will ich auf den Ossa wälzen.“ Her passion makes it impossible to judge her, for even Prothoe, her closest friend says³: „Es läßt sich ihre Seele nicht berechnen.“ Again Prothoe implies something mysterious in the nature of woman in the words⁴:

„Wie manches regt sich in der Brust der Frauen,
Das für das Licht des Tages nicht gemacht.“

Yet Penthesilea herself betrays the fact that she is animated by but one feeling, namely that of unrequited love⁵: „Staub lieber, als ein Weib sein, das nicht reizt.“

In this drama, Kleist has portrayed most vividly how unrequited love rouses woman to action, and what extremes woman is capable of when believing herself spurned. Penthesilea is carried to the very heights of happiness at seeing her wishes apparently realized⁶, but immediately afterward her mad desire for revenge fills her with a wild rage which sweeps everything before it and impels her to slay Achilles who seems to have spurned her love, and to mutilate his body in a fit of frenzy. (Though Penthesilea is endowed with strength and the will to act, she is governed by passion rather than firm, calm purposefulness, and causes her own destruction.

Kleist has expressed himself on the striking difference between two of his heroines. In the fall of 1807 he writes⁷: „Käthchen von Heilbronn . . . ist die Kehrseite der Penthesilea, ihr anderer Pol, ein Wesen, das eben so mächtig ist durch gänzliche Hingebung, als jene durch Handeln.“ In December 1808, he writes again on this subject⁸: „Denn wer das Käthchen liebt, dem kann die Penthesilea nicht ganz unbegreiflich sein, sie gehören ja wie das + und — der Algebra zusammen, und sind Ein und dasselbe Wesen, nur unter entgegengesetzten Beziehungen gedacht.“ Thus Kleist would seem to imply that active endeavor to win the object of her love, as

¹ II, 73, 1194. — ² II, 82, 1375. — ³ II, 94, 1536. — ⁴ II, 92, 1507.

⁵ II, 76, 1253. — ⁶ II, 100, 1696. — ⁷ V, 358, 7. — ⁸ V, 380, 28.

well as the quality of utter self-denial and unselfish sacrifice, are both inherent in woman, and that outward circumstance determines the predominance of one or the other. Yet his women are shown as real active agents only under conditions other than normal; they act decisively only when roused and stung to action by some powerful emotion, which arms them for the time being with powers that ordinarily are but latent.

In *Käthchen*, Kleist has shown utter self-forgetfulness, the entire abandonment of all else for the all-powerful love of man. She leaves „Eigentum, Heimat und den Bräutigam, dem sie verlobt war“¹, and follows Graf Strahl, to whom she is bound in purest love, „in blinder Ergebung von Ort zu Ort“². She is content to endure every hardship if she can but be near him; her one fear is that she may be separated from him. Her love outweighs all else, and defies every analysis of reason³. At the command of Strahl no longer to follow him, she falls into a swoon⁴, yet she feels that his command must be obeyed⁵.

Her unhesitating, firm love endows her with strength to act in emergency⁶; she notifies Strahl of impending danger, thus warning him of a sudden attack upon his castle, that is directed against him and Kunigunde⁷. She arms him with sword, shield and lance when there is not a moment to be lost⁸, and risks her life in an attempt to rescue Kunigunde's valuable possessions from the fire⁹. Again her impulse is to act, to inform Strahl¹⁰, when she has surprised Kunigunde at her bath and has experienced the horror which the latter's sight causes.

By way of contrast with *Käthchen's* unselfish love, Kleist has portrayed in *Kunigunde* a woman whose every quality is repulsive, due to the selfishness, the cold calculation with which she sets about to turn everything to her own personal advantage. She is dead to any finer impulse, and is concerned only with the enhancement of her individual interests. She is characterized by qualities such as sham, hypocrisy, dishonesty, greed, hatred, jealousy, fear and revenge. *Kunigunde* is the embodiment of Kleist's denouncement of selfish-

¹ II, 187, 22. — ² II, 187, 31. — ³ II, 198, 4. — ⁴ II, 209, 22.

⁵ II, 244, 31; II, 284, 8. — ⁶ II, 254, 22. — ⁷ II, 255, 22.

⁸ II, 260, 14. — ⁹ II, 263, 10. — ¹⁰ II, 289, 3.

ness in woman¹: „Nichts dagegen macht das Weib häßlicher und gleichsam der Katze ähnlicher als der schmutzige Eigennutz, das gierige Einhaschen für den eignen Genuß.“

The following characterization of Thusnelda, wife of Hermann is attributed to Kleist by Dahlmann²: „Meine Thusnelda ist brav, aber ein wenig einfältig und eitel, wie heute die Mädchen sind, denen die Franzosen imponieren; wenn solche Naturen zu sich zurtückkehren, so bedürfen sie einer grimmigen Rache.“ Hermann's attitude toward Thusnelda is well in accord with the above characterization, for he treats her indulgently, much as one would a child; he calls her „du Törin“, „Herzchen“, „Thuschen“, and humors her even in her fondness for the Roman legate Ventidius. At the same time, however, he plays the Kleistian role of tutor toward his wife; though he pretends not to take her seriously, he has a definite purpose in mind, namely to raise her to his own views, to bring her to the point where she will share in the general hatred of the enemy. And when she realizes how she has been deceived by Ventidius and swears vengeance, Hermann voices what he had in mind, saying:

„Nun denn, so ist der erste Sieg erfochten!“³

Ventidius' betrayal of her fondness for him, has stirred Thusnelda to the deepest hatred. For she has been fond of him, as was revealed by her ardent plea for his life⁴. She has become enraged because he has toyed with her affections; she has come to a realization that it is only Hermann, who loves her „mit Ehrfurcht und mit Sehnsucht“⁵. Hermann plays upon her grief and disappointment and rouses her to vengeance⁶, until she finally declares⁷: „Arminius' will ich wieder würdig werden.“ Enraged because of his betrayal of her affections, Thusnelda is driven to a wild vengeance, and delivers Ventidius over to the embraces of a wild she-bear. Then her strength, which has been roused so tumultuously, gives way and she falls into a swoon. The wrath, which actuates Thusnelda at the thought of Ventidius' deception of her unrequited affections, is but another manifestation of a frenzy such as that of Penthesilea, who fancies herself spurned by the man she loves. In Thusnelda this passionate anger

¹ V, 138, 7. — ² II, 319, 26. — ³ II, 413, 1865. — ⁴ II, 407, 1727.

⁵ II, 354, 668. — ⁶ II, 411, 1816. — ⁷ II, 436, 2322.

also vents itself in action and results in the death of the man who has deceived her.

In the drama „Prinz Friedrich von Homburg“, the Kurfürstin is utterly devoted to her husband. The rumor of his death spells night and sheer hopelessness for her¹; she cares nothing at all for the splendid victory of the day, nor for the safety it will bring to the country, for her own personal loss overshadows all else². But when she hears that he is still alive, life again has content, value and happiness, as Natalie expresses in the words³: „Des Daseins Gipfel nimmt Euch wieder auf!“ Hers are the qualities of love, devotion and sympathy.

On the other hand, Natalie is another character who becomes resourceful, aggressive and active in the presence of danger to the man she loves. Though “she is but a woman and draws back in horror at the sight of a worm”⁴, occasion ~~arms~~ and fortifies her. Though put to a supreme test, her genuine love cannot be offended even at the renunciation of all claims upon her hand by Homburg, who rates life higher than her when confronted by a death sentence⁵. The necessity of the moment finds her strong, able to encourage him⁶, to enter a plea with the Kurfürst, much to the surprise of Homburg, who asks⁷: „Wo ruhte denn der Köcher dir der Rede bis heute?“ Natalie’s quality of sacrifice manifests itself in her words to the Kurfürst⁸:

„Ich will ihn nicht für mich erhalten wissen —
Mein Herz begehrt sein und gesteht es dir;
Mag er sich welchem Weib’ er will vermählen:
Ich will nur, daß er da sei.“

She becomes resourceful and acts independently, issuing orders to Kottwitz to appear at Fehrbellin⁹, in the hope of saving Homburg’s life. Natalie admires courage and nobility in man¹⁰; they inspire love in her bosom¹¹, a love which no longer values life when death claims the man to whom she is devoted¹².

How Kleist has portrayed in the character of Toni, in „Die Verlobung auf St. Domingo“, another woman who is

¹ III, 55, 523. — ² III, 57, 563. — ³ III, 61, 623. — ⁴ III, 90, 1169.

⁵ III, 83, 1023. — ⁶ III, 84, 1053. — ⁷ III, 85, 1065. — ⁸ III, 86, 1083.

⁹ III, 95, 1265. — ¹⁰ III, 102, 1386. — ¹¹ III, 122, 1801.

¹² III, 122, 1808.

actively engaged in saving the man she loves, is stated by Brahm as follows: „Eine opferfreudige, tatkräftige Frau, die für den Mann ihrer Neigung durch Nacht und Gefahr eilt, wie das Käthchen von Heilbronn“¹. Love for her children makes a heroine of the Marquise von O., for in the consciousness of her own inner worth, she resolves to devote herself to the extent of her ability to the care and education of her children'. Thus again, virtue and love are seen to be the essence of woman's nature, fortifying and strengthening her, and enabling her to rise to an emergency.

Though, in general, Kleist assigns to woman a place of secondary importance in affairs of the world, and submerges her individuality in her duties toward husband and family, he does portray her in his later poetical works, as rising out of her passivity to cope with a situation, if occasion demands it. Yet the force which animates her in so doing, is her love, which sees the object of her affections in danger. Roman Wörner writes on this point as follows*: „Im ‚Vorwärtsschreiten‘ waren schon Heinrich von Kleist und Friedrich Hebbel eine Art Vorkämpfer der Frau geworden — ebenfalls unwillkürlich, ja geradezu gegen ihr Wissen und Wollen. Denn sie beide, die als Menschen, als Mitmenschen ihrer Zeit, der Frau den zweiten Platz anweisen in der Reihe der Wesen, schätzten als Schaffende der Zeit und allen ihren Anschauungen mächtig vorausseilende Künstler das andere Geschlecht ein mit den Augen des Sehers, des Propheten. Oder wäre es Zufall, daß Heinrich von Kleist seine Psyche — den ganzen Glanz seiner Seele — inkarniert in eine Penthesilea? Sind es Wesen zweiten Ranges, die Marquise von O., die durch reine, starke Weiblichkeit das unerhörte Geschick überwindet, und Natalie, an der allein der gebrochene Held sich aufrichtet, und die ebenbürtigen Sinnes und Gemütes hintreten darf vor den großen Kurfürsten? Selbst das Käthchen in all ihrer Weibesdemut und Ergebenheit: muß sich nicht ihr „hoher Herr“ an ihrer inneren Größe erst langsam zu ihr erziehen, zu ihr emporfinden?“ Yet throughout all his life, Kleist viewed the element of unselfish sacrifice as the cardinal quality and virtue

¹ Otto Brahm: Das Leben Heinrichs v. Kleist, p. 411. — ² III, 274, 23.

* Roman Wörner: Henrik Ibsen, Vol. 2, p. 66.

of woman¹: „die Kunst . . . sich aufzuopfern, ganz für das, was man liebt, in Grund und Boden zu gehen: das Seligste, was sich auf Erden erdenken läßt, ja worin der Himmel bestehen muß, wenn es wahr ist, daß man darin vergnügt und glücklich ist“.

Virtue.

With regard to Kleist's conception of virtue and morality, Kayka makes the following statement²: „Wenn wir von der kurzen Periode seines Skeptizismus absehen, können wir sagen — immer gab es für ihn absolute, sittliche Werte. . . . Ihm war es heiliger Ernst damit, ein sittlich reiner und guter Mensch zu sein, und dieser Ernst durchdrang sein ganzes Wesen, und alles, was er tat und schuf . . . Pflichttreue und Wahrheit sind die Pole seiner Seele.“

✓ Kleist's early view, as revealed in his letters and in the „Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden“, is based on the conviction that the order of the world is a moral one, and that virtue is rewarded, whereas evil is punished³. That virtue demands reward of some kind or other, is expressed repeatedly by Kleist at this early period of his life. In a letter to his former teacher Martini in 1799 he says⁴: „So übe ich mich unaufhörlich darin, das wahre Glück . . . nur als Belohnung und Ermunterung an die Tugend zu knüpfen.“ And again⁵: „Es ist kein besserer Sporn zur Tugend möglich, als die Aussicht auf ein nabes Glück, und kein schönerer und edlerer Weg zum Glück denkbar, als der Weg zur Tugend“. This latter statement also occurs word for word in the „Aufsatz“⁶. Right conduct, he maintains, brings cheerfulness and satisfaction as its reward⁷; on the other hand an evil conscience is a source of torment⁸. Rahmer says of Kleist's attitude in these early letters⁹: „Uns imponiert die gewissenhafte Ehrlichkeit, der frühreife Ernst in seinen Briefen, der wohl erzogene, moralisierend-philiströse, altkluge Ton, den er anschlägt. . . . Wie ein junger Römer philosophiert Kleist über den Lohn der Tugend.“

¹ V, 433, 15. Nov. 9, 1811. — ² Ernst Kayka: Kleist u. die Romantik, p. 164. — ³ IV, 64, 16. — ⁴ V, 27, 2. — ⁵ V, 27, 23. — ⁶ IV, 59, 27.

⁷ V, 107, 18. — ⁸ V, 131, 14. — ⁹ S. Rahmer: Heinrich v. Kleist als Mensch u. Dichter, p. 234.

With all this insistence that virtue receive its just reward, Kleist admits feeling that virtue loses some of its exalted state if it is to be rewarded¹. However, he feels that it is within the province of only a few souls to love and practise virtue for its own sake². Such qualities are, indeed, to be admired, according to Kleist, but cannot be demanded³. Virtue is primarily the guide of man on the road to happiness. „Die Tugend macht nur allein glücklich . . .⁴. Einzig allein nur die Tugend ist die Mutter des Glücks, und der Beste ist der Glücklichste⁵.“

In the same essay from which the above is quoted, Kleist endeavors to define virtue, but admits that he associates rather a vague exalted meaning with this much-used term. He writes⁶: „Es erscheint mir wie ein Hohes, Erhabenes, Unnennbares, für das ich vergebens ein Wort suche, um es durch die Sprache, vergebens eine Gestalt, um es durch ein Bild auszudrücken. Und dennoch strebe ich ihm mit der innigsten Innigkeit entgegen, als stünde es klar und deutlich vor meiner Seele. Alles was ich davon weiß, ist, daß es die unvollkommenen Vorstellungen, deren ich jetzt nur fähig bin, gewiß auch enthalten wird; aber ich ahnde noch etwas mehr, noch etwas Höheres, noch etwas Erhabeneres, und das ist es recht eigentlich, was ich nicht ausdrücken und formen kann.“ He adds that since he has busied himself with his „Bildung“, his conception of virtue has become more distinct; he hopes it will strengthen his powers and inspire his will⁷. This then, is the enthusiastic though rather vague conception of virtue of Kleist at the age of twenty-two. But though he does not define virtue at this period nor at a later one, he at various times enumerates qualities which in the aggregate might well represent his idea of virtuous conduct. His letters abound in such enumerations, which will be cited together with those from other writings.

In an attempt to describe virtue more closely, he writes at some length as follows⁸: „Wenn ich Ihnen mit einigen Zügen die undeutliche Vorstellung bezeichnen soll, die mich als Ideal der Tugend im Bilde eines Weisen umschwebt, so

¹ IV, 59, 11. — ² IV, 59, 14; V, 27, 11. — ³ V, 48, 28.

⁴ IV, 59, 34. — ⁵ IV, 60, 10. — ⁶ IV, 60, 15. — ⁷ IV, 60, 25.

⁸ IV, 61, 1.

würde ich nur die Eigenschaften, die ich hin und wieder bei einzelnen Menschen zerstreut finde und deren Anblick mich besonders rührt, z. B. Edelmut, Menschenliebe, Standhaftigkeit, Bescheidenheit, Genügsamkeit etc. zusammentragen können; aber, Lieber, ein Gemälde würde das immer nicht werden, ein Rätsel würde es Ihnen, wie mir bleiben, dem immer das bedeutungsvolle Wort der Auflösung fehlt. Aber, es sei mit diesen wenigen Zügen genug, ich getraue mich schon jetzt zu behaupten, daß wenn wir, bei der möglichst vollkommenen Ausbildung aller unsrer geistigen Kräfte, auch diese benannten Eigenschaften einst fest in unser Innerstes gründen, ich sage, wenn wir bei der Bildung unsers Urteils, bei der Erhöhung unseres Scharfsinns durch Erfahrungen und Studien aller Art, mit der Zeit die Grundsätze des Edelmut, der Gerechtigkeit, der Menschenliebe, der Standhaftigkeit, der Bescheidenheit, der Duldung, der Mäßigkeit, der Genügsamkeit usw. unerschütterlich und unauslöschlich in unsern Herzen verpflanzen, unter diesen Umständen behaupte ich, daß wir nie unglücklich sein werden“. Other virtues are enumerated as follows: „Die Zufriedenheit unsrer selbst, das Bewußtsein guter Handlungen, das Gefühl unsrer durch alle Augenblicke unsers Lebens vielleicht gegen tausend Anfechtungen und Verführungen standhaft behaupteten Würde¹; Gerechtigkeit Wohltätigkeit, Bescheidenheit im Glücke, Größe und Standhaftigkeit im Unglück²; Großmut, Bescheidenheit, Wohltätigkeit . . . für die Menschen und zu ihrem Nutzen“³.

In Kleist's letters the following moral qualities are held up as being exemplary: Honesty, Kleist declares to be the highest law⁴. His sincerity is revealed in these lines⁵: „Vor Dir will ich nicht besser erscheinen, als vor mir selbst, auch Schwächen will ich vor Dir nicht verstecken. Also aufrichtig und ohne allen Rückhalt“. In the same letter to Wilhelmine he writes⁶: „Laß uns wahr sein, ohne geschraubte Tugend.“ Again he says⁷: „Die Notwendigkeit, eine Rolle zu spielen, und ein innerer Widerwillen dagegen machen mir jede Gesellschaft lästig, und froh kann ich nur in meiner eigenen Gesellschaft sein, weil ich da ganz wahr sein darf.“

He deems tolerance a great virtue and makes repeated

¹ IV, 61, 24. — ² IV, 70, 15. — ³ IV, 73, 4. — ⁴ V, 59, 8.

⁵ V, 154, 2. — ⁶ V, 155, 17. — ⁷ V, 197, 17.

mention of it¹. Kleist is most emphatic in his denunciation of selfishness²: „Zu welchen Abscheulichkeiten sinkt der Mensch hinab, wenn er nichts als seinen eignen Vorteil im Auge hat. Pfui! Lieber alles verlieren, als durch solche Mittel gewinnen.“ He is quite lavish in his praise of unselfishness, and terms it primarily a feminine virtue³. In describing his friend Brockes to Wilhelmine, Kleist dwells on his unselfishness. He asks her if she knows what it means to be truly unselfish and confesses that it is a most difficult virtue⁴. After enumerating various ways in which Brockes' absolute, thoroughgoing unselfishness and devotion manifested themselves under the most trying situations, he urges her to follow his friend's splendid example, and pronounces it to be his most sacred intention to do likewise⁵. He concludes as follows⁶: „Denn wahre Uneigennützigkeit zeigt sich in dem Talent, sich durch den Eigennutz Andrer nie gekränkt zu fühlen, eben so gut, ja selbst noch besser, als in dem Talent ihm immer zuvor zu kommen. Daher klage den Andern nie um dieser Untugend an. Wenn er dein freiwilliges Opfer nicht versteht, so schweige und zürne nicht, und wenn er ein Opfer von Dir verlangt, vorausgesetzt, daß es nur möglich ist, so tue es, und er mag es Dir danken, oder nicht, schweige wieder und zürne nicht.“

Kleist rejoices on discovering the growth of virtues in Wilhelmine such as „Ernst, Würde, Ruhe und Bescheidenheit“⁷, and his pleasure is all the greater because of the feeling that he is contributing to her development⁸. His „moralische Ausbildung“, the development of such virtues as have been herein enumerated, Kleist considered his most sacred duty⁹. „Bildung“, he regarded as the key to an understanding of virtue¹⁰; the dictates of reason he held to be fundamental to the practice of virtue, for, he wrote¹¹: „Wer gebietet uns aber die Tugenden der Menschenliebe, der Duldung, der Bescheidenheit, der Sittsamkeit zu üben, wenn es nicht die Vernunft tut?“

Yet he is aware of the fact that the path of virtue is not an easy one¹². On one occasion he maintains that man

¹ V, 185, 5; V, 202, 19; V, 129, 31. — ² V, 77, 1. — ³ V, 138, 5.

⁴ V, 189, 13. — ⁵ V, 192, 28. — ⁶ V, 193, 9. — ⁷ V, 181, 19.

⁸ V, 153, 1. — ⁹ V, 32, 3. — ¹⁰ V, 28, 3. — ¹¹ V, 44, 17.

¹² V, 146, 30.

must aim to shape his environment in such a manner as to minimize temptation, thereby enabling himself to husband his energies for the pursuit of life's goals. Thus he writes to Wilhelmine¹: „Ich fühle, daß es mir notwendig ist, bald ein Weib zu haben. Dir selbst wird meine Ungeduld nicht entgangen sein — ich muß diese unruhigen Wünsche, die mich unaufhörlich wie Schuldner mahnen, zu befriedigen suchen. Sie stören mich in meinen Beschäftigungen — auch damit ich moralisch gut bleibe, ist es nötig — Sei aber ganz ruhig, ich bleibe es ganz gewiß. Nur kämpfen möchte ich nicht gern. Man muß sich die Tugend so leicht machen als möglich. Wenn ich nur erst ein Weib habe, so werde ich meinem Ziele ganz ruhig und ganz sicher entgegen gehen — aber bis dahin — o werde bald, bald, mein Weib.“

X At the time of his disillusionment, subsequent to his study of Kant, Kleist writes to Wilhelmine, that from his boyhood days he had believed development and a gradual growth in perfection to be the object and plan of creation². This, then, had formed the basis of his ethical concepts. With this support gone, he is filled with doubt and morbid skepticism of all ultimate values whatsoever, he despairs of finding any inviolate standard upon which he can build. „Wissenschaft und Bildung“, which had hitherto seemed the means of ascertaining ultimate truths and of attaining virtue, perfection and happiness itself, now appear unreliable and unable to lead to an understanding of what is good or evil. Without any such guide, he asks, can man be held responsible for his conduct, for his actions?³ He gives expression to relativistic notions and asks⁴: „Was ist böse? Absolut böse? Tausendfältig verknüpft und verschlungen sind die Dinge der Welt, jede Handlung ist die Mutter von Millionen andern und oft die schlechteste erzeugt die besten — Sage mir, wer auf dieser Erde hat schon etwas Böses getan? Etwas, das böse wäre in alle Ewigkeit fort?“ He even suggests that the whole meaning of life is wrapped up in seeking pleasure: „Leben so lange die Brust sich hebt, genießen, was rundum blüht“⁵. „Ja, unsinnig ist es, wenn wir nicht gerade für die Quadratrute

¹ V, 154, 21. — ² V, 203, 27. — ³ V, 249, 10. — ⁴ V, 249, 18.

⁵ V, 249, 29.

leben, auf welcher, und für den Augenblick, in welchem wir uns befinden. Genießen! Das ist der Preis des Lebens!"¹

During this period of skepticism, he doubts the responsibility of man for his acts², and maintains that there often is no other course for man to pursue than to do wrong³. Yet during this time when he utterly loathes science and knowledge⁴, he gradually comes to feel the need of doing something good; not „Wissen“, but „Handeln“. He writes⁵: „Es liegt eine Schuld auf dem Menschen, etwas Gutes zu tun, verstehe mich recht, ohne figürlich zu reden, schlechthin zu tun.“ Similarly he writes⁶: „Ein großes Bedürfnis ist in mir rege geworden, ohne dessen Befriedigung ich niemals glücklich sein werde; es ist dieses, etwas Gutes zu tun.“ He admits that he is in a quandary as to what this good act is to be⁷, but after much hesitation he presents it under the name of a Persian law, which however savors strongly of Rousseau⁸: „Ein Feld zu bebauen, einen Baum zu pflanzen, und ein Kind zu zeugen . . . Das soll ich tun, das weiß ich bestimmt.“ This last quotation is from a letter dated October 10, 1801, after which time his correspondence yields nothing of vital importance for this theme until June 8, 1807⁹, when there appears a statement which shows that his conception of virtue is dominated by the sense of duty to nation and society. *

Before the subject of Kleist's attitude on the relation of the individual to society is treated, however, a few of the more pregnant quotations on virtue from Kleist's earlier works will be cited. In „Die Familie Schroffenstein“ Eustache voices the thought that a realization of one's wickedness is a great step toward moral regeneracy¹⁰: „Denn nie besser ist der Mensch, als wenn er es recht innig fühlt, wie schlecht er ist.“ Nor shall such a man be condemned¹¹: „Den soll kein Mensch verdammen, der sein Urteil selbst sich spricht.“ He is to be encouraged¹²: „O hebe dich! Du bist so tief bei weitem nicht gesunken als du hoch dich heben kannst.“ Moreover, to err is human, says Sylvester; but though this is true, man must strive to rise above the errors of the past¹³.

¹ V, 250, 13. — ² V, 213, 28. — ³ V, 269, 3. — ⁴ V, 260, 20.

⁵ V, 250, 20. — ⁶ V, 259, 7. — ⁷ V, 259, 20. — ⁸ V, 262, 6.

⁹ V, 340, 16. — ¹⁰ I, 114, 1915. — ¹¹ I, 114, 1918. — ¹² I, 114, 1920.

¹³ I, 59, 964.

True virtue does not boast, says Merkur to Charis in *Amphitryon*¹:

„Pfleg deiner Tugend,
Nur führe sie nicht, wie ein Schlittenpferd,
Stets durch die Straße läutend, und den Markt.“

The difference between vaunted pretended virtue, as seen in Charis, and genuine innate virtue, which is a vital part of Alkmene, is quite apparent. Alkmene values virtue more than life, and cannot bear the thought of life, if she may have sinned against her virtue, be it wittingly or unwittingly²:

„Ich will nichts hören, leben will ich nicht,
Wenn nicht mein Busen mehr unsträflich ist.“

Bull!

Such passages from Kleist's earlier works show our author to have overcome his morbid skepticism as to ethical values. His nature was too sound, to permanently entertain doubt as to the demands of virtue and the responsibility of man for his actions.

Duty and the relation of the individual to the state.

Thus far Kleist's conception of duty has not been touched upon. This theme can be developed to advantage by treating it in connection with a discussion of his view of the relation of the individual to society, in which ethical principles of a specialized rather than of a general nature will be involved. Kleist had a peculiarly strong sense of duty, so strong in fact, that it involved him in conflicts which would not arise for one endowed with a lesser feeling of responsibility for his actions. His ardent, fiery temper, which would not allow him to rest until his thoughts had been carried to their ultimate analysis, presented him with problems which are not apparent to the more conservative temper. Moreover, his reflective disposition, which was given to overmuch introspection, often of an unhealthy, depressing, moody sort, caused him many a bitter struggle.

In his youth, Kleist was a rigorous individualist viewing duty as the responsibility of man to develop himself to the highest degree of perfection. This, he writes to his former teacher Martini, he deems one of his most sacred duties³, one which enjoins the further duty of resigning from the army,

¹ I, 227, 572. — ² I, 259, 1278. — ³ V, 32, 3.

that he may devote his undivided time and energy to its fulfillment. He is confident that such a course will ground him in all that is worth while: „Dann . . . wird die Erde unser Vaterland, und alle Menschen unsere Landsleute sein. Wir werden uns stellen und wenden können, wohin wir wollen, und immer glücklich sein“¹. Thus he is inspired by a cosmopolitan ideal such as Treitschke sums up in the following words²: „Frei hinwegzuschauen über alle die trennenden Schranken des endlichen Daseins, nichts Menschliches von sich fern zu halten, in lebendiger Gemeinschaft mit den Besten aller Völker und Zeiten das Reich der Ideen zu durchmessen“.

An enumeration of some of the characteristic expressions of Kleist's during this period of his life will reveal his keen sense of duty and its tendencies. He feels the need of formulating a definite plan for his life, in order that his desires may not be in contradiction with his duties³. Reason must determine the path of duty and must bring the desire and insistence not to deviate from it⁴. He urges Ulrike⁵ not to lose sight of woman's primal duty, motherhood, a sacred obligation.

Among the so-called „Fragen zu Denkübenungen für Wilhelmine v. Zenge“ of the spring of 1800, Kleist includes this question⁶: „Darf man wohl von einem Menschen immer mit unerbittlicher Strenge die Erfüllung seiner Pflichten verlangen, oder kann man schon mit ihm zufrieden sein, wenn er seine Pflichten nur immer anerkennt und den guten Willen, sie zu erfüllen, nie verliert?“ That he would insist upon the former view with all the rigor of his impetuous spirit, seems very probable in the light of some subsequent statements about the inviolability of duty. Thus he writes to Wilhelmine in August of the same year⁷: „Wenn auch die Hülle des Menschen mit jedem Monde wechselt, so bleibt doch Eines in ihm unwandelbar und ewig: das Gefühl seiner Pflicht.“ He feels keenly the struggle between duty and inclination, as is to be seen in a further letter to her⁸: „Wie doch zwei Kräfte immer in dem Menschen sich streiten! Immer weiter von Dir führt mich die eine, die Pflicht, und die andere, die Neigung, strebt immer wieder zu Dir zurück.“ The full weight which

¹ IV, 67, 25. — ² Heinrich von Treitschke: Deutsche Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts. 4. Aufl. I, p. 195. — ³ V, 43, 28. — ⁴ V, 44, 28.

⁵ V, 45, 7. — ⁶ V, 64, 9. — ⁷ V, 70, 30. — ⁸ V, 107, 14.

he attaches to duty seems expressed in these words to Wilhelmine¹: „Aber in uns flammt eine Vorschrift — und die muß göttlich sein, weil sie ewig und allgemein ist, sie heißt: erfülle deine Pflicht; und dieser Satz enthält die Lehren aller Religionen.“ And again²: „Ich erfülle für dieses Leben meine Pflicht, und wenn Du mich fragst: warum? so ist die Antwort leicht: eben weil es meine Pflicht ist.“ Duty for its own sake and for the satisfaction it leaves in its train is his motto; such a course of conduct, alone, can grant a placid conscience³. He affirms his valuation of duty in these words⁴: „Meine Pflicht ist mir höher selbst als mein Glück“. Unselfishness, which he has pronounced a cardinal virtue, he designates as a duty⁵: „Was ist der Genuß eines Vorteils gegen die Entzückung eines freiwilligen Opfers! Auch in dem geringfügigsten Falle erfülle diese schöne Pflicht, ja geize sogar begierig auf Gelegenheit wo du sie erfüllen kannst.“

The general trend of the above passages is such as to point out the emphasis which Kleist laid upon the duty of the individual to himself. He is strongly imbued with a sense of duty, but not insofar as it regards the relation of the individual to society like that of an integral part to an organic whole. He insists upon the duty that man owes to himself to develop his own talents; a development which his own conscience demands of him. Although he refers to the necessity of educating himself as a citizen⁶, yet he commits himself in no way as to what constitutes a good citizen; very likely he means one who has developed himself as an individual by becoming enlightened and intelligent. Brahm has characterized Kleist's early attitude, and at the same time indicated a subsequent change in it in the following words⁷: „Nur auf die Pflege seines Innern bedacht, in extremem Ich-Kultus wollte er, im Widerstreit der Pflichten, jene gegen die eigene Seele lieber erfüllen, als die gegen die Allgemeinheit, sie werde nun Gesellschaft, Staat oder Vaterland genannt. Ein Bürger des ästhetischen Staates, hatte er von dem öffentlichen Leben sich mit egoistischer Einseitigkeit abgekehrt; und erst als unter gewaltigem Krachen mit der Schlacht bei Jena dieser ästhe-

¹ V, 130, 21. — ² V, 131, 7. — ³ V, 143, 36. — ⁴ V, 178, 6.

⁵ V, 192, 37. — ⁶ V, 144, 24.

⁷ Otto Brahm: Das Leben Heinrichs von Kleist, p. 237.

tische Staat zusammengebrochen war und eine neue Zeit heraufkommen wollte, mit neuen Anschauungen, neuen Idealen, lebte auch Kleist den Umschwung mit. Ja, es darf gesagt werden, daß in keiner Erscheinung unserer Literatur die Wandlung klarer und großartiger zum Ausdruck kommt, als in ihm.“

It now becomes necessary to trace the gradual change in Kleist's views from an individualistic sense of duty to self, to one which recognizes the claims which society and the state have upon him. The conflict of the individual, who is seeking to develop his every quality to the highest degree of perfection, with a society which seems to restrict him through its own claims to recognition, was a bitter one in the case of Kleist. And with a tenacious, ardent, passionate nature such as his, the change was a thorough one, which served to make the last years of his life more full of meaning than the earlier ones had been.

At the age of 21, Kleist utterly lacks the feeling of service to the state in his capacity as an officer in the army. He feels at variance with the whole spirit of the army and finds it exceedingly irksome to be a party to such an autocratic organization. He detests military discipline, views officers as mere mechanical drill masters, the soldiers as slaves, and the whole regiment with its maneuvers as „ein lebendiges Monument der Tyrannei“¹. The great objection he has to such military organization lies in his belief that it crushes all individuality, degrades man into a mere tool, robbing him of all spontaneity and of the right to dictate his own course of action. He does not see in the army an opportunity of service to something higher than the individual, does not see in it a means of protecting the safety and security of a state, which, by being thus safeguarded, can grant its citizens opportunity for development and expansion in the arts of peace. He merely rebels at seeing his personality repressed and thwarted in its free development.

He feels that he is misunderstood by men generally; a thousand bonds join men together, — such as opinions, common interests, desires, hopes, prospects — yet all these bonds do not unite him with them². His interests are entirely different from theirs, and, being misunderstood by them, they must be

¹ V, 31, 24. — ² V, 49, 22.

locked up within the innermost recesses of his heart. His efforts toward development are not in the interests of society, but are bent toward the fulfillment of duty toward himself¹. Everything which may serve as an obstacle to his personal plans must be removed; for that reason he resigns from the army, declines to accept office and lives for himself. State, politics and the royal court know only their own cold advantage². If he is to take a position, it is not to be in the service of the state, but an academic one which will not impose limitations upon him as a „Weltbürger“³. He voices his objection to a position as a state official repeatedly, but most emphatically in a letter to Wilhelmine v. Zenge of Nov. 13, 1800⁴. He feels himself at variance with the state, his own views would be in opposition with the decrees he would be called upon to carry out. He could not submit to orders without an investigation as to their merits, for that would degrade him to a mere tool, devoid of personal integrity. Hence he would not merely come into conflict with the state, but would flatly refuse to obey. Moreover, such an office would curtail him in his striving toward „Bildung“. His individualistic position further stands out in these words as found in the same letter⁵: „Denn zufrieden mir wirklich Kenntnisse zu erwerben, bekümmert es mich wenig, ob Andere sie in mir wahrnehmen“. Hence he sees in public office no means of service to the state. His resentment at the repression of individuality entailed in service of the state, is emphasized in these words⁶: „Am Hofe teilt man die Menschen ein, wie ehemals die Chemiker die Metalle, nämlich in solche, die sich dehnen und strecken lassen, und in solche, die dies nicht tun — Die ersten, werden dann fleißig mit dem Hammer der Willkür geklopft, die andern aber, wie die Halbmetalle, als unbrauchbar verworfen. Denn selbst die besten Könige entwickeln wohl gern das schlummernde Genie, aber das entwickelte drücken sie stets nieder; und sie sind wie der Blitz, der entzündliche Körper wohl entflammt, aber die Flamme ausschlägt.“ Angered at the cool attitude of the king toward him, he asserts that he does not need a king, but that the latter does need subjects⁷. Under the influence of his observations in Paris, where

¹ V, 50, 30. — ² V, 59, 9. — ³ V, 59, 20. — ⁴ V, 150, 33ff.

⁵ V, 151, 23. — ⁶ V, 168, 24. — ⁷ V, 168, 20.

science seems but to have furnished the means for the growth of immorality and dissoluteness, he accuses the state of having regard for truth and knowledge only insofar as they will yield dividends. For he says¹: „Ist es ihm um Wahrheit zu tun? Dem Staate? Ein Staat kennt keinen andern Vorteil, als den er nach Prozenten berechnen kann. Er will die Wahrheit anwenden. — Und worauf? Auf Künste und Gewerbe. Er will das Bequeme noch bequemer machen, das Sinnliche noch versinnlichen, den raffiniertesten Luxus noch raffinieren.“ Thus does Kleist challenge the state, in which he sees little or nothing to be admired or respected. Yet even Kleist, who has so stoutly defended the right of the individual to proceed in his development, unhampered by the claims of state and society, ultimately comes to a realization of the true greatness of the state. Through becoming a patriot Kleist learns a new standard of values.) ? oh ?

In January 1802, Kleist writes to his sister Ulrike from Bern, that he has no opinion in matters political². Yet only a few months later, he writes that he has no desire to become a French citizen³, and complains that Switzerland is becoming a victim of French brutality⁴, and that the French are „Affen der Vernunft“⁵. In December 1805, he deploras the lamentable inactivity and lack of aggressiveness in the campaign against Napoleon⁶, whom he later denounces as a tyrant⁷. His letters now contain more and more frequent references to the war, to a decided antipathy toward the French, and to a genuine sympathy with the cause of his state. In June 1807, in a letter to Ulrike, he strikes a note which is of importance, inasmuch as it shows an utter change from his former individualistic, self-centered attitude. He writes⁸: „Doch genug jetzt von mir. Es ist widerwärtig, unter Verhältnissen, wie die bestehenden sind, von seiner eignen Not zu reden. Menschen, von unsrer Art, sollten immer nur die Welt denken. Was sind dies für Zeiten! Und das Hilfloste daran ist, daß man nicht einmal davon reden darf“. This represents a marked change from the Kleist who had felt himself aloof and isolated from society, who had deemed to have nothing in common with his contemporaries, who had been

¹ V, 247, 28. — ² V, 278, 18. — ³ V, 283, 22. — ⁴ V, 284, 27.

⁵ V, 284, 31. — ⁶ V, 323, 9. — ⁷ V, 330, 12. — ⁸ V, 340, 16.

craving nothing but seclusion and the opportunity for self-development. His active interest in matters of national concern grows, and finds expression in April 1809 in these words¹: „Ich auch finde, man muß sich mit seinem ganzen Gewicht, so schwer oder leicht es sein mag, in die Wage der Zeit werfen.“ It has now become his duty to enter the lists and to come to aid in the struggle of his time. His regret is that he cannot do more, for, in referring to his poems „Germania“, „An Franz den Ersten“, and „Kriegslied der Deutschen“, he says²: „Ich wollte, ich hätte eine Stimme von Erz, und könnte sie, vom Harz herab, den Deutschen absingen“. He writes to Friedrich v. Schlegel in June 1809³: „Es ist nur ein Gegenstand, über den der Deutsche jetzt zu reden hat.“ In December 1810, Kleist announces⁴ that the „Abendblätter“ are being published for the purpose of stimulating and increasing interest in matters of national import. In June 1811, he assures Friedrich Wilhelm III⁵, that he has regard for only such interests as coincide entirely with those of the nation. It is important to note the difference in attitude expressed in these lines and in the passage already quoted⁶: „Wenn er (der König) meiner nicht bedarf, so bedarf ich seiner noch weit weniger.“ On September 19, 1811, he writes to Chancellor of State v. Hardenberg, regarding an appointment in the army⁷, thus revealing in what a different light he now regards such service from that expressed at the age of 21, when he left the service because it thwarted his development as an individual. Moreover, in a letter to Marie v. Kleist, dated but a few weeks before his death, Kleist voices himself to the effect that the alliance which the king bids fair to form with the French is not of the kind which will make life valuable⁸. In such a move Kleist saw ruin and disgrace for his country, an ignominy which he could not endure.

This account contains the more important of Kleist's direct utterances, which trace the change in his conception of duty from a purely individualistic turn to that of a devotion to the state as an institution entitled to the support and hearty cooperation of its citizens. It now remains to follow out this same change as revealed in his other writings.

¹ V, 385, 16. — ² V, 385, 22. — ³ V, 389, 20. — ⁴ V, 406, 23.

⁵ V, 421, 16. — ⁶ V, 168, 20. — ⁷ V, 431, 2. — ⁸ V, 434, 24.

In the drama „Penthesilea“, the relation of both Achilles and Penthesilea to their subjects is one of subordination of the welfare of the whole to the desire and caprice of the individual. And this in spite of the fact, that Achilles, as one of the leaders of the Greeks, and Penthesilea, as queen of the Amazons, should keenly feel the responsibility for the well-being of the tribe that such leadership demands.

Achilles acts with singleness of purpose, intent only upon winning Penthesilea, whatever the cost may be. He turns a deaf ear to all pleas for the safety of the Greek army, and insists upon carrying out his own desire in spite of the danger to the Greek forces. He ~~affirms that he will be devoted to Penthesilea but a month or two,~~ and adds haughtily¹: „Das wird euch ja den alten, meerzerfressenen Isthmus nicht gleich zusammenstürzen“. Thus Achilles is lost to everything but the fulfillment of his individual desire, and gives up without hesitation his plan to aid in the common cause he had espoused²; more than that, he jeopardizes his men's very existence without any feeling of responsibility for their safety. Brahm sums up the correspondence of Achilles' individualism with that of the younger Kleist as follows³: „Die rücksichtslose Kleistart Achills, seine eigensinnige Selbstherrlichkeit und Selbstsucht offenbart sich freilich hier erst voll; allen Vorstellungen setzt er trotzig sein: ich will's! entgegen, und läßt sein persönliches Begehren der Rücksicht auf das Allgemeine vorangehen“.

Penthesilea herself, the queen of the Amazons, wages a conflict between individual desire and her duty to her race, but the woman in her, the yearning for love and individual happiness, triumph over the queen and her responsibility to the laws of her state. Kleist's own rebellion against any law outside of himself, against restraint, and his shaking off of such restriction, is reflected in the words of Penthesilea, who says⁴: „Doch alles schüttelt, was ihm unerträglich, der Mensch von seinen Schultern sträubend ab.“ In spite of the duty she owes to the Amazon state, in spite of the fact that she, as queen should stand uncompromisingly for the enforcement of those laws which safeguard the very foundations of her state,

¹ II, 137, 2476. — ² II, 140, 2518.

³ Otto Brahm: Das Leben Heinrichs von Kleist, p. 223.

⁴ II, 112, 1934.

she yields to her desires. She is aflame with one desire and will sacrifice all else for its fulfillment¹:

„Die Lust, ihr Götter, müßt ihr mir gewähren,
Den einen heißersehten Jüngling siegreich
Zum Staub mir noch der Füße hinzuwerfen.
Das ganze Maß von Glück erlass' ich euch,
Das meinem Leben zugemessen ist.“

She vows not to rest until she has conquered him², and is deaf to all pleas for the safety of the state; she would rather be dust than to be a woman who cannot charm Achilles³. Prothoe warns her that she will not win Achilles, but will merely lose the youths who have been captured by dint of inestimable hardships⁴; the highpriestess admonishes and reproaches her all to no avail, and points out the loss of blood and of prisoners, which her arbitrary, wilfull conduct has caused, without making any impression upon Penthesilea's desires. As a result, both Achilles and Penthesilea pay with their lives for their utter disregard of the welfare of their subjects. Even in death, Penthesilea renounces the law of her state⁵: „Ich sage vom Gesetz der Fraun mich los, und folge diesem Jüngling hier.“ Thus in 1808, Kleist delineates the tragic death of hero and heroine alike as the result of arbitrary disobedience of the law, of following their individual inclinations rather than honoring the welfare of the whole.

In his journalistic writings, poems and shorter productions, following upon Penthesilea, Kleist's patriotism finds repeated and powerful expression. In Penthesilea, Kleist delineated the conflict between the individual and the state, a conflict which crushed the former because of his insistence upon desires which clash with the general welfare, thus bringing those to a tragic death who cannot rise above their personal demands. It is through his patriotic emotion that Kleist is really raised to the realization of the sacredness of fatherland, state and law. In his appeals to the down-trodden German people, this patriotism voices itself with a powerful, genuine feeling.

A wild, stirring call to arms is sounded in the poem „Germania an ihre Kinder“⁶, in which intense hatred and passionate desire for vengeance upon the common enemy mount

¹ II, 57, 844. — ² II, 58, 864. — ³ II, 76, 1253. — ⁴ II, 55, 801.

⁵ II, 166, 3012. — ⁶ IV, 30.

to a terrible climax¹. But he also calls upon his countrymen to obey and honor their rulers in the quest for liberation from the common enemy².

It is in the collection of writings intended for publication in the „Germania“, that Kleist's sense of duty to the state and nation stands out unequivocally, in all the directness and emphasis of which his impassioned pen was capable. According to Steig, Kleist wrote these articles in the spring of 1809³. In a fragmentary introduction, Kleist states the purpose of this proposed publication as follows⁴: „Jetzt, oder niemals, ist es Zeit, den Deutschen zu sagen was sie ihrerseits zu tun haben, um der erhabenen Vormundschaft, die sich über sie eingesetzt hat, allererst würdig zu werden: und dieses Geschäft ist es, das wir, von der Lust, am Guten mitzuwirken, bewegt, in den Blättern der „Germania“ haben übernehmen wollen. Hoch, auf den Gipfel der Felsen, soll sie sich stellen und den Schlachtgesang herabdonnern ins Tal! Dich, o Vaterland, will sie singen; und deine Heiligkeit und Herrlichkeit; und welch ein Verderben seine Wogen auf dich heranwältzt!“

In number three of the „Satirische Briefe“, he calls upon the individual to regret no sacrifice for the success of the war⁵. In the „Katechismus der Deutschen“⁶, the same idea is driven home with the greatest simplicity, directness and emphasis. Without stinting, man must contribute everything within his power to the common cause, reserving for his own needs merely water, bread and clothing; money and goods are a mere nothing as compared with the welfare of the nation⁷. Not to give and risk everything for the common cause would be disgraceful and despicable⁸; not to come to the aid of the nation would be treason punishable by death⁹. Out of this spirit was born the ardent defense of his nation and setting forth of her virtues as found in the article „Was gilt es in diesem Kriege?“ Some of the more striking passages in it will show how strongly Kleist is imbued with a feeling of love, respect and veneration for his state and with the conviction that his nation is rendering a service to all humanity¹⁰.

¹ IV, 32, 49. — ² IV, 33, 78. — ³ IV, 52, 3. — ⁴ IV, 82, 7.

⁵ IV, 89, 6. — ⁶ IV, 100 ff. — ⁷ IV, 109, Chap. 13. — ⁸ IV, 110, Chap. 14. — ⁹ IV, 111, Chap. 15. — ¹⁰ IV, 115, 21; IV, 116, 26.

Thus Kleist's attitude has been transformed through his intense patriotism from rigorous individualism to a communistic feeling that grows on and on. In the face of a national crisis, he now deems any consideration of self to be utter disgrace and a crime before God who has decreed that man be free by dint of his own efforts. He becomes an ardent supporter of state and nation, and in turn sees in the state an organization which helps to attain and achieve that which is greatest and noblest in all humanity. Since the state serves such great ends, it is struggling only for high ideals in maintaining itself, ideals which are as follows¹: „Gott, Freiheit, Gesetz und Sittlichkeit, für die Besserung einer höchst gesunkenen und entarteten Generation, kurz für Güter, die über jede Schätzung erhaben sind, und die um jeden Preis, gleichviel welchen, gegen den Feind, der sie angreift, verteidigt werden müssen.“ In the maintenance of such ideals, the state is justified in the most rigorous demands upon its citizens²: „die Regierung hat . . . ihre bestimmten Forderungen an das Volk zu machen, mit den Kräften desselben willkürlich zu schalten, und um ihre Anordnungen zu erreichen, denselben schuldigen Respekt zu verschaffen.“

Kleist's ardent patriotism, his bitter hatred of the enemy of his nation, his plea for subordination of individual interests to the general welfare, find poetic and fiery expression in the drama „Die Hermannsschlacht“; the final acknowledgement of the duty of the individual to the state and of deference to law as the foundation on which the state is reared is developed in the figure of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg. These last two dramas of Kleist are the poetic reflex of what has already been noted in part in his shorter prose writings.

In the figure of Hermann, the hero of the „Hermannsschlacht“, Kleist has portrayed a genuine patriot, one of the deepest dye, one whose every thought is the freedom of his race from oppression, whose every act is prompted by this motive, who is impatient with every force which may serve to swerve him from his course, and check him in the attainment of the one purpose that dominates every fibre of his being. The great duty, to which all else must be subordinated, is to rid his country from Roman oppression. It is of the

¹ IV, 120, 9. — ² IV, 120, 17.

utmost significance, however, to note that no thought of individual aggrandizement actuates him; he is not merely willing to sacrifice, but actually does make every possible sacrifice for the common cause. To what a degree he does this, is all the more apparent because of the glaring contrast between himself and other princes who are impelled but too strongly by the desire to win for themselves.

The selfish wish of Dagobert and Selgar to advance their individual interests is well characterized by the complaint of Wolf¹:

„Es bricht der Wolf, o Deutschland,
In deine Hürde ein, und deine Hirten streiten
Um eine Handvoll Wolle sich.“

Well does Hermann know the jealousy and greed of those chieftains, which will lead them to espouse the cause of the Romans against their own kin, if it be to their private advantage². Hermann's attitude is in sharp contrast with that of the princes Dagobert and Selgar, as well as that of Thuis-komar and Wolf, who, though not indifferent to the common danger are interested largely in protecting their wealth. He annuls all private interests, and disregards all else in the effort to crush the foe of his country. His spirit is the same as that which Kleist has poured into the poem „An Friedrich Wilhelm den Dritten, König von Preußen“, in which³ he calls upon patriots to let their fields of grain be trampled down in glorious battle, to let their houses become a prey to flames; for all material goods, however costly and precious, are but made to sink into the dust for the preservation of higher goods.

But beyond sacrificing ambition⁴, and risking the life of his sons in the interests of this noble cause⁵, Hermann is even impatient of any feeling in his breast that tends to deflect him from it in the least. Hatred, intense hatred of the enemy is his sworn duty, and vengeance becomes a virtue, says he⁶, so long as this scorned progeny of hell breathes defiance on German soil. Yet Hermann has not become a brute without any finer sentiment, he has not disregarded ordinary ethical principles out of sheer wantonness and blood-thirstiness; his duty is the preservation of a state, of a people,

¹ II, 326, 72. — ² II, 333, 245. — ³ IV, 36, 17. — ⁴ II, 357, 750; II, 358, 769. — ⁵ II, 356, 727. — ⁶ II, 407, 1723.

whose very existence is threatened, and for so sacred a cause everything else must give way; necessity knows no higher law than unqualified surrender to so noble an issue.

It has already been intimated that „Die Hermannsschlacht“ is but the poetic reflex of the change which had come over Kleist's views. But it was the fire of patriotism which led him to a realization of something greater than the perfection of self and the satisfaction of personal desires and ambitions. It was his patriotism that inspired such lines glowing with the spirit of the most thoroughgoing, unquestioning sacrifice of individual hopes for the sake of the state. In another drama, „Prinz Friedrich von Homburg“, Kleist has sketched his change of view in its development, showing the conflict which he, too, had to wage before coming to a recognition of the sacredness of law as the foundation upon which rests the security of the state, whose sanctity and inviolability must be upheld. In the figure of the prince, Kleist has portrayed the struggle of the emotional, subjective, thorough-going individualist in coming to a realization of his duty to a state which exists not as an end in itself, but as the guarantor of protection and safety to its citizens. In this drama there is less of the wild vigor, of the passionate, even fierce devotion of a Hermann to the ideal of the nation, but rather a noble, calm, resolute reverence for an ideal which has been won as the result of a severe struggle.

At the beginning of the drama, Homburg is portrayed as a young dreamer, reveling in visions of a great sweeping victory which shall redound to his own honor and glory, bringing him distinction, reward and happiness. He craves to see the whole store of fortune, of success, of victory at his own feet, and gives no thought to what it will mean to the state or to the ruler whose colors he bears. His disobedience in the battle is the logical outcome of an absentmindedness due to his reveling in hopes for individual success when the safety of the state should have been uppermost in his mind.

After having been sentenced to death by a court-martial and having realized that the Kurfürst is in deadly earnest, he collapses and becomes, as Natalie says, „ein unerfreulich jammernswürd'ger Anblick!“¹ The weakness of the individu-

¹ III, 90, 1166.

He has
found
standing
of Kleist

alist, who has nothing to stay him but his own hopes and ambitions, has been drawn here by Kleist in splendid contrast with the firmness, absolute unity and harmony of thought and action of the character who is actuated by a great motive lying outside of the realm of individual aggrandizement. This picture of the wavering nature of the individualist stands in sharp contrast with the calm, dispassionate, masterful poise of the Kurfürst, who knows no other law, who breathes for no other aim than the maintenance of the state he serves.

When so rigorous an individualist as Homburg first comes to a realization of the state as a unit larger than himself, he sees in it only a dire force, which thwarts the citizen. The prince is cowed and terrified by the vision of a stern, unbending law which can determine his fate by a cold decree, a law before which the individual seems to dwindle into a mere tool, a soulless being. He sees in law merely brute force. It is only when the Kurfürst lays the decision of his fate in his own hands, when he is given an opportunity to think and act again, that he is aroused from his torpor and terror, and realizes that the law is more than a soulless hangman's axe made to strike terror and to frighten into obedience. He begins to see that it is the means of upholding the inviolability of a state which draws its sanctity from the intelligent acquiescence and support of its citizens, a state which aims to give opportunity and in turn has a right to service from the governed.

Don't show this all!

In the development of Homburg's respect and reverence for the law and the state, Kleist has mirrored the change and rise in his own view from that of pronounced individualism to a recognition of the sanctity of the state. In the figure of the Kurfürst, he may have consciously embodied that steadfastness of purpose which was lacking to him, and which comes by absolute devotion of the individual to an ideal far above individual ambitions and aspirations. This recognition of the sacred duty of the individual to the larger unit is one that Kleist reached after a severe struggle, one which gave the later years of his life a deeper value than his earlier life had known. From a selfish individualism he rose to a keen appreciation of the right of the whole to prevail over the part. He struggled and attained the height characterized by



Petsch as follows¹: „Als wahres Gut aber, als Verkörperung des göttlichen Willens im irdischen Geschehen, als echte Grundlage aller wertvollen Liebe und Freundschaft erscheint ihm das Vaterland.“

Conclusion

The results of this investigation show that just as Kleist's fundamental approach to life changed vitally and fairly rapidly from an early confidence in reason to an ultimate faith in „Gefühl“ as a guiding power, so his views were in the main transformed correspondingly.

Prior to 1801, Kleist maintained an attitude of independence toward organized forms of religion. He had little sympathy with church ceremonials and with religious speculation. This grew out of his insistence that man's concern is primarily with life in the present, and out of the conviction that religious contemplation tended to cause man to lose sight of his immediate duties. He considered religion valueless unless it have a directing effect upon man's life, imbuing him with a strong sense of duty and responsibility, and impelling him to fill his place in this world to the best of his ability. He defined his own religion as the search for truth and knowledge, and the attempt thereby to approach ultimate perfection. Catholicism appealed to him only at a time when his confidence in knowledge and reason had been shattered, when he had become susceptible to the appeal made to the senses by the Catholic ceremonial, by architecture, sculpture and music. His craving for something firm, to which he might cling, was the cause of his temporary desire for a „drop of forgetfulness which might enable him to become Catholic“. Later in life, he again cherished his early ideal of growing in perfection, but his reliance then was upon faith rather than on the power of reason. Yet his emphasis remained on activity in the present, on fulfilling one's duty.

Kleist's conception of immortality was seen to have remained essentially unchanged. He held that death was not the final end of all existence, but that it resembled sleep, in

¹ Robert Petsch: Heinrich v. Kleist als tragischer Dichter, Germanisch-Romanische Monatshefte, Bd. I, 1909, p. 547.

that it left the spirit, the real essence of being, refreshed for a resumption of effort on a higher level of perfection, where that which had remained imperfect and incomplete, was to be subsequently developed into higher, purer form. Kleist apparently believed in the maintenance of individual identity after death, for he held that man was to profit, in continued existence upon another star, by the insight gained in this world.

Before 1801, Kleist viewed God as ultimate truth and perfection, to be approached in proportion as man attained to a higher understanding of these qualities. (He believed that God was eminently just, rewarding good and punishing evil.) Yet beyond this, Kleist deemed it impossible for man to conceive God and to comprehend his purpose. After his catastrophe over Kant, Kleist's confidence in the ability of man to ascertain truth was undermined, and he emphasized more than ever the impossibility of comprehending God and his plans. Yet after this period of skepticism as to all values, he seems to have believed again in a benevolent Providence — „Es kann kein böser Geist sein, der an der Spitze der Welt steht; es ist ein bloß unbegriffener!“ — which reveals itself to faith rather than to reason. In the exultant mood immediately preceding his death, he writes that he prays to God after having hitherto found prayer impossible.

Prior to his disillusionment over Kant, Kleist asserts that man is subject only to the dictates of reason; subjection to a capricious fate is but a sign of infirmity of the will, of a failure to have chosen a definite goal whose attainment will direct man's efforts. (When he becomes skeptical of reason, and despairs of its guiding power, he feels himself to be a mere plaything of fickle fortune, a veritable prey to accident, to a blind, unintelligible fate.) In his later years, Kleist held, that though life be a struggle with fate, man must fortify himself by definiteness of purpose and firmness of will, must actively cope with fortune, trying to wrest from it what he desires, and accepting what falls to his lot without faltering in the struggle.

Kleist believed in the mental superiority of man over woman, and relegated her to second place in the affairs of the world. Just as rational faculties characterize man, so sympathy, greater responsiveness, kindness and patience are cha-

racteristic of woman. Woman is passive as opposed to the activity of man; she is primarily the wife and the mother whose happiness lies in devotion to her husband and to the care of her children. In general, the women characters which Kleist has created, correspond to his views of woman as expressed in his letters. Yet the really great female characters of his later and maturer works rise out of themselves in case of an emergency and actively cope with the situation. They act decisively when roused and stung to action by some powerful emotion, which arms them for the time being with powers that ordinarily are latent.

In his earlier years, Kleist maintained that the order of the world is a moral one, in which virtue is rewarded and evil is punished. Virtue demands and needs the stimulus of reward, because exceedingly few men can love and practice virtue for its own sake. Therefore he posits happiness as the reward of virtue. He finds it impossible to define virtue, but enumerates a large number of virtuous qualities, of which he emphasizes „Edelmut, Standhaftigkeit, Bescheidenheit, Genügsamkeit, Gerechtigkeit, Duldsamkeit, Mäßigkeit, Zufriedenheit, Aufrichtigkeit, Uneigennützigkeit.“ Following upon his disillusionment over Kant, he becomes skeptical of all moral values and questions man's responsibility for his acts; he despairs of any inviolate standard of conduct and entertains relativistic notions. Temporarily, life seems to be devoid of deeper significance but soon he comes to a realization of man's obligation to do something good. He turns from an early conception of virtue as being true to himself in the endeavor to grow in perfection, to an ultimate sense of duty to the state.

From an individualistic regard for duty toward himself and a challenge of everything that tended to hinder him in his free development, Kleist was led through his awakened ardent patriotism to a realization of state and nation as ends which demand the heartiest support on the part of the individual, whose duty demands that he enlist his every faculty in their development and preservation. Prior to 1807, he had often felt himself aloof and isolated from society, but now he holds that it is everyone's duty to enlist in the struggle for the nation's existence. From a pronounced individualism, Kleist came to a keen appreciation of the right of the whole to prevail over the part.

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5. **Mixed Preterites in German.** By **O. P. Rein**, Ph. D., Assistant Professor in the University of North Carolina. 1915. VIII u. 131 S. gr. 8. Geh. 4,60 M; Leinwdbd. 5,40 M.

6. **Der Teufel in den deutschen geistlichen Spielen des Mittelalters und der Reformationszeit.** Ein Beitrag zur Literatur-, Kultur- und Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands von Dr. phil. **Maximilian Josef Rudwin** (Purdue-Universität). 1915. XI u. 194 S. gr. 8. Geh. 5 M; Leinwdbd. 5,80 M.

„Die vorliegende Studie ist eine mühevoll, fleißige, philologisch durchgearbeitete Stoffsammlung auf Grund des vorhandenen reichen Quellenmaterials und der Spezialliteratur. Das Verzeichnis der in abgefügter Form angeführten Bücher füllt neun, das der in abgefügter Form angeführten Spiele fünf Druckseiten. Trotz der Beschränkung auf die mittelalterlichen Spiele werden doch mit Bedacht die Tiroler und Luzerner Dramen des 16. Jahrhunderts berücksichtigt. Als einen wichtigen, allgemein interessanten Gesichtspunkt seiner Arbeit hebt der Verfasser hervor: die in den dramatisierten Teufelsvorstellungen des Mittelalters befundene Verschmelzung des germanischen Volksglaubens an Kobolde, Unholdinnen, Elfen, Zwerge u. s. w. mit den biblischen Vorstellungen vom Teufel und den mönchlichen und kirchlichen Phantasien über ihn gewähren ein bedeutungsvolles kulturgeschichtliches Spiegelbild des deutschen Volkes in jener Zeit. Die Ausstattung des Buches ist vortrefflich.“

Albrecht, Raumburg a. S., im Theolog. Literaturbericht 1915, 12.

7. **The Attitude of Gustav Freytag and Julian Schmidt toward English Literature (1848—1862).** By **Lawrence Marsden Price**, Ph. D., Instructor in German in the University of Missouri. 1915. VIII u. 120 S. gr. 8.

Geh. 3,60 M; Leinwdbd. 4,40 M.

„Wir verdanken den jungen amerikanischen Universitäten schon eine stattliche Reihe willkommener Arbeiten über die verschiedensten Gebiete der deutsch-englischen literarischen Beziehungen, und dieses vorliegende neue Buch darf ohne Bedenken den besten darunter zugerechnet werden. Der Verfasser hat zwar davon abgesehen, sich selbst und sein Urteil in den Vordergrund zu stellen. Er will nur „der Herausgeber, nicht der Kritiker“ Julian Schmidts sein; aber gerade durch diese weise Beschränkung gelingt es ihm, ein mit Fleiß und Geschick entworfenes Bild von Schmidts und Freytags Beziehungen zur jüngeren englischen Literatur zu zeichnen. . . . Das Nähere sollte man in dem Buche selber nachlesen, da in dieser kurzen Besprechung selbst wesentliches unerwähnt bleiben mußte. Wer sich mit der Geschichte der Urteilsbildung über englische Dinge, oder mit der Geschichte der deutschen Literatur in jenem Zeitraum befaßt, darf diese Arbeit nicht vernachlässigen. Wir sind dem Verfasser zu Dank verpflichtet, daß er Ordnung in die etwas weitschweifigen literarischen Ergüsse der fünfziger Jahre gebracht hat. . . .“

Heinrich Mutschmann, Frankfurt a. M., in der Anglia, Beiblatt, 26. Bd., Nr. 12.

8. **Zur Geschichte der westgermanischen Konjunktion** *Und*. Von **Edward H. Sehr**, Instructor in Delaware College. Mit einer Karte. 1916. II u. 56 S. gr. 8. Geh. 2 M; Leinwdbd. 2,80 M.

9. **The Attitude of Heinrich von Kleist toward the Problems of Life.** By **John Carl Blankenagel**, Ph. D., Associate Professor of German, Goucher College, Baltimore. 1917. IV u. 84 S. gr. 8. Geh. etwa 3,50 M; Leinwdbd. etwa 4,30 M.

Æsperia Ergänzungsreihe:

Schriften zur englischen Philologie.

Unter Mitwirkung von **Hermann Collitz** herausgeg. von **James W. Bright**
Professoren an der Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

In mehr als einer Hinsicht erschien es zweckmäßig, diejenigen Monographien der *Æsperia*, die sich vorwiegend auf die englische Sprache und Literatur beziehen, zu einer besonderen Abteilung zusammenzufassen. Bildet doch das Studium des Englischen, wenn auch in gewissem Sinne nur ein Teil der germanischen Philologie, doch zugleich ein Arbeitsgebiet für sich, das sowohl an der Universität wie an der Schule als selbständiges Fach der deutschen Philologie zur Seite steht. Demgemäß werden Schriften, die in das Gebiet der englischen Philologie fallen, als Ergänzungsreihe zur *Æsperia* erscheinen.

1. **Æft:** *Some Parallel Formations in English.* By **Francis A. Wood**, Assoc. Professor of Germanic Philology, University of Chicago. 1913. II u. 72 S. gr. 8. 2,40 *ℳ*; *Leinwdbbd.* 3 *ℳ*.
2. **Æft:** *Historia Meriadoci and De Ortu Waluuanii.* Two Arthurian Romances of the XIIIth Century in Latin Prose edited by **J. Douglas Bruce**, Professor of the English Language and Literature in the University of Tennessee. Second Edition. Texts revised and corrected. Introduction re-written and enlarged. 1913. LXXVI u. 96 S. gr. 8. *Geh.* 3 *ℳ*; *Leinwdbbd.* 3,80 *ℳ*.
3. **Æft:** *The Dramas of Lord Byron.* A Critical Study by **Samuel C. Chew Jr.**, Ph. D., Associate in English Literature in Bryn Mawr College; sometime Fellow of the Johns Hopkins University. 1915. VI u. 182 S. gr. 8. *Geh.* 6 *ℳ*; *Leinwdbbd.* 6,80 *ℳ*.

„Chews Schrift, die durch ihre Stilistik und die maßvolle Art ihrer Polemik einen sehr gefälligen Eindruck hinterläßt, bietet eine Zusammenfassung der an Byrons Dramen geübten Kritik, welcher der Verfasser sein eigenes, dem Dramatiker Byron im allgemeinen günstigeres Urteil gegenüberstellt. Auch die deutschen Beiträge, besonders Eimers neuere Arbeiten, sind oft berücksichtigt, wie man dann überhaupt durchgehend den Eindruck sorgfältiger Arbeit erhält . . . Eine erfreuliche Leistung, die uns der von Chew in Aussicht gestellten Abhandlung über die Entwicklung der Byron-Kritik mit Interesse entgegensehen läßt.“

G. Koepfel, Straßburg, in der Deutschen Literaturzeitung 1915, Nr. 16.

Im Druck:

4. **Æft:** *Stonyhurst Pageants.* A new cycle of Old Testament Religious Plays, written about 1610. Discovered and published by Professor **Carleton Brown** (of Bryn Mawr College). 1917. VI u. 302 S. *Geh.* etwa 10 *ℳ*; *Leinwdbbd.* etwa 11 *ℳ*.

„Professor Brown has discovered the above-named cycle of Old Testament Religious Plays, written about 1610, long after we believed such plays were presented in England. The cycle is almost complete. It lacks five pageants at the beginning, and something at the end. But all the rest is complete and in good condition. The completeness is indeed remarkable, for it is the fullest Old Testament cycle known now. Every student of the Early Drama of Europe will be interested in it. It is absolutely new material of the utmost importance. The text is in septenary verseform.“

Professor James W. Bright, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.

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